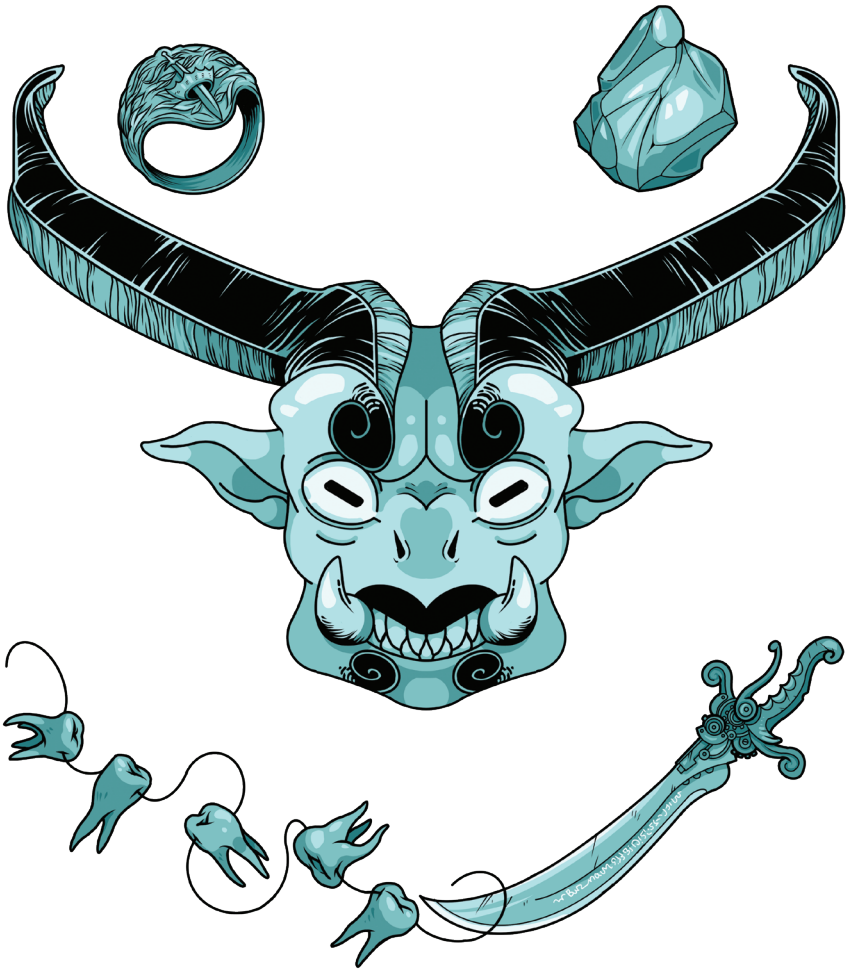
the Big Book of

BIG BADS



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Disclaimer: This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

FOREWORD

I have a short adventure—about twelve hours' worth of play, eighteen if things go totally sideways—that I know so well I can pull it out anytime I want to run an impromptu game. It begins like this: for some reason, salt has become scarce across the land, and nobody knows why. Today, however, there's a merchant in the marketplace with a large supply, and people are lining up to buy some. A shabbily dressed commoner marches up to the head of the line and offers the merchant 40 gold pieces for the entire barrowload. The merchant balks, but the commoner ups his bid to 45 gold pieces, then 50. Increasingly uncomfortable, the merchant finally gives in, takes the money, and runs. The crowd of would-be buyers, enraged, sets upon the buyer; before anyone else can act, the mob beats him to death. And then, amid shrieks of surprise and horror, a humanoid brain on four large-pawed legs springs from the scuffle and tears across the market square.

This situation is so *weird*—you want to know what's happening, don't you? Where did that thing come from? Where did that guy get all that money? Why *salt?*

Curiosity. That's what propels the adventures that players remember. A scenario that gets its hooks into you and makes you ask, *Why?*

You might expect more personal feelings—for instance, the feeling of being directly attacked or otherwise wronged—might exert a stronger pull on players. In the moment, perhaps. However, making an adventure memorable requires more than that. Basic, primal revenge is often anticlimactic; it leaves players unsatisfied, wanting more.

What is it they're looking for? Meaning. An explanation. An answer to the implicit question,

Why did you do this to me?

I'm going to go out on a limb and declare that for revenge, or any other victory, to feel meaningful and satisfying, the heroes of the story need to go through two stages:

"This makes no sense."

"This finally makes sense."

The screenwriter Blake Snyder called this story path the "Whydunit." Figuring out who your enemy is is only half the story. Figuring out *why* your enemy is your enemy is the other half.
This latter half is what gives the player characters' struggle importance. Now the villain of the adventure isn't just an adversary who must be overcome because that's what the adventure formula demands.
Now they present a chance for PCs to express their values through action. Maybe they find the villain's motives particularly abhorrent and commit themselves that much more fully to their defeat. Maybe they sympathize with the villain and try to help them attain their goals in a less harmful way—or maybe their sympathy is eclipsed by a threat the villain poses to someoneor something they care deeply about. Maybe they're confused and horrified and simply want to make the whole situation go away.

The "why" matters as much as—if not more than—the "what."

That's what makes these Big Bads great. In the stories they tell themselves, *they're* the central characters. Every one of them wants something: something they can't have without inflicting violence, knowingly or unknowingly, upon those around them—something that brings them into conflict with the Player Characters. And the thing is, it's never personal—to *them.* The PCs aren't even characters in their story … until they become characters
in the PCs' story, at which point, a confrontation becomes inevitable.

It's how villains work in real life, isn't it?

In a roleplaying game, though, we get to kick their butts.

And just as we learn why they do the villainous things they do, what nagging, underlying desire or fear drives them to inflict harm upon those around them, we get to tell them—and show them—why that was such a fatal mistake.

And boy, is that satisfying.

Keith Ammann,
Author, *The Monsters Know What They're Doing*
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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The Big Book of Big Bads is designed to be used with the 5e Core Rules. Creatures marked in **bold blue** text can be found in this book. Creatures marked in **bold purple** text can be found in the 5e Core Rules. Magic items and spells are written in *italics*, and new items found in this book are also marked with an asterisk *. Text marked in **bold red** refers to another section of this book. All other basic rules and nonmagical equipment can be found in the 5e Core Rules.

The book is broken down into seven sections. First, **The Big Bads** are presented alphabetically. These boss monsters are described with their tactics, backstory, game statistics, and any minions or magic items they might have. Each Big Bad is designed to be the main boss of its own story arc—villains tend to be self-centered, after all—but they can also be dropped into a campaign at any point to cause some havoc or support a larger plot. Some Big Bads are connected to each other, like Akkaidai and The Horned Giant or Magda and Rel'Um.

Next is a chapter on **Building Big Bad Campaigns**. This presents ways to combine multiple Big Bads into longer, interconnected adventures using campaign frameworks.

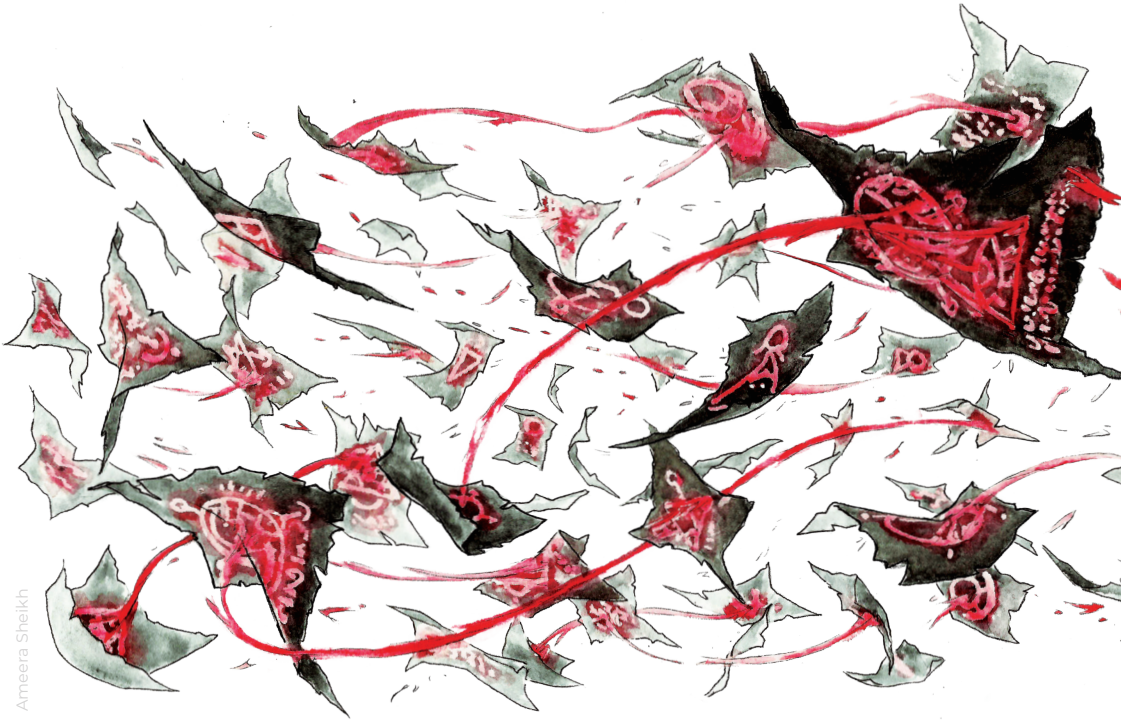
Another way of creating adventures showcasing multiple Big Bad is provided in **The Big Bad Bureau Wants You**. This section introduces a new organization dedicated to managing the threat of Big Bads across the multiverse as well as new player options and campaign ideas.

Appendix A: Lair Maps provides beautiful cartography of the lairs of several Big Bads.

Appendix B: Art shows off some of the special edition covers for some of the Big Bads, illustrated by Federico Piatti. It also features developmental sketches from some of the amazing artists who worked on this project and helped bring the Big Bads to life.

Appendix C: Big Bads by Type and CR provides lists of the Big Bads organized by their monster type and Challenge Rating.

Finally, the **Index** lists all stat blocks and magic items found in the Big Bads with their page number for quick and easy reference.



Ameera Sheikh

Frederico Piatti

BIG BAD
MAGNUM ET MALUM
MAGNUM ET MALUM
BUREAU
THE BIG BADS
BIG BAD BUREAU
SPECIAL INVESTIGATION FILES
Materials contained here within are from confidential sources and contain restricted information. All materials enclosed are strictly for internal use of the BBB.
WARNING: INTERNAL DISSEMINATION ONLY
CLASSIFIED

AKKADIA

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 006	ALIAS: The Mirror Mage
SIZE: Medium	TYPE: Humanoid
DANGER LEVEL: 9 to 11	DEMEANOR: Dazzlingly Devious

WARNING:

THREE TIMES TRICKIER THAN EXPECTED

NOTES:

We've had troubling reports that Akkadia is aware of the other Big Bads and has begun targeting them with her heists. This is an evolving situation. Report all developments directly to me.

-Chief Runcible Scowler

Concept: Michael Holik
Writing & Game Design: Michael Holik
Original Cover: Anna Christenson
Illustrations: Will Kirkby

Akkadia, The Mirror Mage

A young wizard of great renown, **Akkadia** "The Mirror Mage" has embarked on a globe-spanning crime spree, performing heist after theatrical heist of rare relics. Clad in colorful robes and wearing her signature domino mask, she employs her magic to beguile guards while putting on a spectacular performance. Illusory music sets the scene, magical lights spin through a fantastical fog, and Akkadia appears on the scene, ready to dazzle and thieve. When she's at last cornered, an ill-gotten prize cradled under one arm, she unveils her signature trick: *mirror image*.

Pieces of a Puzzle. Akkadia has performed several high-profile heists of private collections, treasuries, and bank vaults, acquiring a collection of eclectic arcane artifacts in the process. According to authorities, there appears to be no connection between the items stolen. Some say she is assembling an arcane device from constituent parts, while others think she's following a millennia-old trail of breadcrumbs to the score of the century.

The Mirror Mage. Akkadia earned her moniker for her unbelievable use of the *mirror image* spell, through which she creates duplicates that can move independently and even cast their own spells. This potent variation on the spell produces only two duplicates of the caster, rather than the usual three. This is hardly a concession, however, when all three can sling spells in unison. For centuries, arcanists have thought such illusion magic impossible, if not downright laughable, yet Akkadia casts it all the same. Such groundbreaking arcane skill could make Akkadia an archmage of her own tower or a famed researcher, but sadly, she's chosen a life of crime.

Triple-Threat. To create *mirror image* duplicates which move on their own, speak, cast spells, and maintain concentration isn't just extraordinary, it's impossible. Akkadia isn't a wizard of singular power, in truth, she's actually a set of identical triplets playing the part of one. The triplets—Adabel, Maribel, and Rosabel Domarov—have been adopting this character since they were girls, and have become quite adept in the deception.

Even without magic, they're practically indistinguishable, making the *mirror image* gimmick a natural fit. While one of the triplets plays the part of Akkadia, the others wait nearby under cover of *invisibility*. When Akkadia casts "casts *mirror image*," the other sisters merely reveal themselves and begin fighting in earnest. A handful of other illusions, some practiced stunts, and a bit of theatrics are all that's needed to sell the ruse. They go to great lengths to conceal their deception while fighting, coordinating spells and turning invisible when wounded. While engaged in this deceit, their combined might is enough to lay opponents low or pull off daring heists.

Triple Trouble!

Family First. The triplets Adabel, Maribel, and Rosabel are a tight-knit family, and though they often butt heads about the best way to practice their 'art', they care for each other deeply. Their love for each other is second only to their love for their mother, Miray Domarov. Though she was a formidable spellcaster in her youth, and taught the girls the fundamentals of spellcasting, age has stripped her arcana and left her bedraggled, bordering on senile. The siblings visit her often, and this is one of the rare occasions in which they break character.

Enigma of the Horned Giant. The purpose of the Domarovs' crime spree is to solve a centuries-old riddle, called the Enigma of the Horned Giant, and save their mother from certain death. This Enigma refers to a fragmentary statue recovered from an ancient storm giant temple, and a single illustration of the assembled 10-foot tall statue, the eponymous Horned Giant. Much to the dismay of archeologists and sages of giantkind, no amount of effort has been able to reconstruct the shattered colossus, even as more of its parts have been uncovered. Each constituent piece seems to be missing a different component, which were previously embedded within the statue itself. Though the illustration reveals what the statue looked like when completed, it makes no mention of these strange internal components; instead its only caption describes the statue as being an artifact of godly power, capable of remedying any illness and perpetuating any life.

Against all odds, the triplets have uncovered a lead: a piece of pottery depicting a number of storm giants desecrating a statue, and pulling various magic items—swords, crowns, cups, and so on—from the debris. If perhaps, certain magic items once acted as connections between the statue's torso and its limbs and head, new magic items might be able to mend it. If such a thing were true, the Horned Giant might truly be an artifact of incomprehensible power, capable of turning back the sands of time and restoring their mother's mind and magic.

They need to collect the statue's parts: it's arms, legs, torso, and, of course, its horned head, and a veritable treasure trove of magic items with which to connect them. Nothing less than a crime spree would do.

Better Left Buried. Little do the Domarov triplets know, the **Horned Giant** was desecrated and scattered for good reason. This immense statue depicts a long-dead archfiend of the Lower Planes, a scourge of hell that once invested a fragment of its infernal power in this statue, allowing it to ravage the Material Plane. Once reassembled, it will be able to do so again. However, its power over mortality is not understated; the Horned Giant could very well restore Miray Domarov to her former self, but would exact a terrible price in exchange for the deed.

Domarov Triplets

Roleplaying Akkadia

The Mirror Mage always makes a dramatic entrance, but only once the triplets have ensured that everything will go according to plan. Illusions are set, escape routes are secured, and major threats are dealt with before the theatrics begin. Once she appears in a flash or a puff of smoke, Akkadia takes her time delivering a monologue and boasting of her skill. Without fail, the delivery is as melodramatic as it is playful.

As three individuals, Adabel, Maribel, and Rosabel have their own personalities and quirks, which might show in their different renditions of Akkadia. Adabel, the oldest by a few seconds, is blunt and likes to set the tone for her sisters. She often concocts plans, and she was the one to devise the name of their collective alter-ego. Maribel, the middle sister, is by far the most studious of the three. Though quieter than her sisters, she knows several languages and a host of arcane tricks unknown to the others. The youngest sister, Rosabel, is the most performative, considering herself an actor as well as a mage. Though the three triplets speak with an identical voice, their skills and outlooks will shine through when they take turns playing Akkadia.

The sisters will never break character while playing Akkadia, even in the most desperate situations. No one (save for the girls' mother) knows their true identity, so maintaining the lie is imperative to their continued success. Whenever possible, the three will follow a set of guidelines which ensure they seem like a unified mage (such as moving and casting simultaneously) and will only shirk them if one of the sisters is in mortal peril.

However, if any of the three mages should die, the surviving sisters' portrayal of Akkadia will turn downright spiteful. Revenge will be their priority, and killing a few innocents won't get in the way of that.

Akkadia's Tactics

When Akkadia finds herself in a fight, she "casts *mirror image*" as a reaction (breaking concentration on the existing *invisibility* spells), revealing the mage triplets at once. Each "duplicate" Akkadia uses the provided statistics. They cast illusion and enchantment spells to escape, if possible. If violence is called for, they synchronize the casting of spells using readied actions, so as to decimate one target at a time with spells like *lightning bolt* and *scorching ray*. Should any mage fall below half their maximum hit points, they cast *invisibility*, *greater invisibility,* or use the to *clearglass pendant** escape.

Akkadia's Traits

Each of the triplets who play Akkadia share the following bond:

Bond. "I will never break character while portraying Akkadia."

Adabel's Traits

The oldest sibling, Adabel, has the following ideal and flaw:

Ideal. "I'll unravel the Enigma of the Horned Giant to restore my mother's arcane talents."

Flaw. "I tend to think twenty steps ahead, even when the plan only requires three steps."

Maribel's Traits

Maribel, the middle sibling, has the following ideal and flaw:

Ideal. "I'll learn the forgotten art of shadow illusion, and be the first to record it in a book."

Flaw. "I condescend to others, especially non-spellcasters."

Rosabel's Traits

Rosabel, the youngest, has the following ideal and flaw:

Ideal. "I'll be the world's greatest wizard and it's greatest thief. Or failing that, a glamorous actress."

Flaw. "I tend to be needlessly theatrical, especially when there's an audience for the heist."

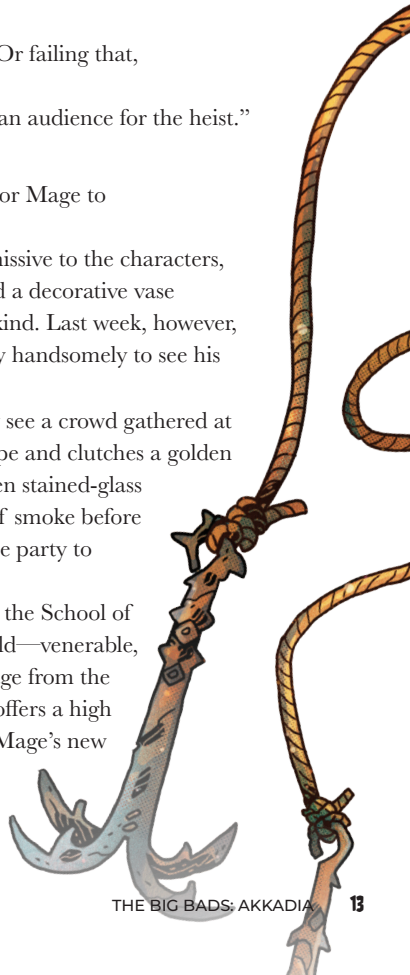
Adventure Hooks

Consider the following plot hooks if you wish to introduce the Mirror Mage to your campaign:

Scholar of the Horned Giant. A wealthy antiquarian sends a missive to the characters, requesting their services. He explains that he has discreetly acquired a decorative vase depicting the Horned Giant, a cryptic mythological figure of giantkind. Last week, however, someone broke into his home and stole the rare artifact. He will pay handsomely to see his property returned undamaged.

Heist. While the characters are passing through a large city, they see a crowd gathered at the foot of a cathedral. High above, a caped figure hangs from a rope and clutches a golden religious icon, a fragment of a fallen angel's halo. Guards at a broken stained-glass window rush down the rope after the thief, who vanishes in a puff of smoke before they can reach her. The local city watch are baffled, and bring in the party to investigate further.

Professional Rivalry. For decades, the unquestioned master of the School of Illusion was Velay the Blue. She's approaching five hundred years old—venerable, even by elven standards—but will be damned if some unknown mage from the human lands challenges her supremacy before she dies. The mage offers a high bounty to anyone who can discreetly steal the secret of the Mirror Mage's new illusion magic.



The Museum

When the Domarov triplets return from a big heist, they store their latest prizes in a magnificent mansion along with the rest of their trinkets. Inside, the walls are festooned with artifacts from all periods of history, pilfered from every kingdom in the world. It would seem the triplets were collecting long before their recent crime spree.

Lair Actions

In this mansion, the triplets are on their home turf and can utilize a number of magic defenses to oust any intruder. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Akkadia can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects. She can't use the same lair action two rounds in a row:

- Hundreds of *magic mouths* appear and begin shouting. Each creature within 60 feet of a point chosen by Akkadia must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature is deafened for 3 (1d6) rounds and takes 14 (4d6) thunder damage. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and is not deafened.
- Akkadia presses a hidden button, opening up a 5-foot square magical pit trap on the ground. A creature standing over the pit trap when it opens must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall into it. After falling for 1 minute, the creature is ejected from the *magnificent mansion*, landing prone. A creature which can scale the walls or fly can escape the pit trap normally.
- Akkadia targets one creature she can see within 60 feet of her by manipulating the mansion's magic defenses. A 5-foot-cube *antimagic* field appears, centered on the target and moving with it until initiative count 20 on the next round.

The Right Tools for the Job

Even though every heist is painstakingly planned, each triplet has a selection of specialized magic items to help them out in case a plan falls apart. Obfuscation and deception are key in keeping Akkadia's true identity secret, and the *magician's cape** obscures the nature of the triplet's magic. Should they get cornered or otherwise forced to talk their way out of a situation, the *ring of glibness** they each carry gives them an edge during tense conversations. Finally, if any of the triplets suffer serious injury, their custom crafted *clearglass pendants** give them one last chance to escape to safety.

Ring of Glibness

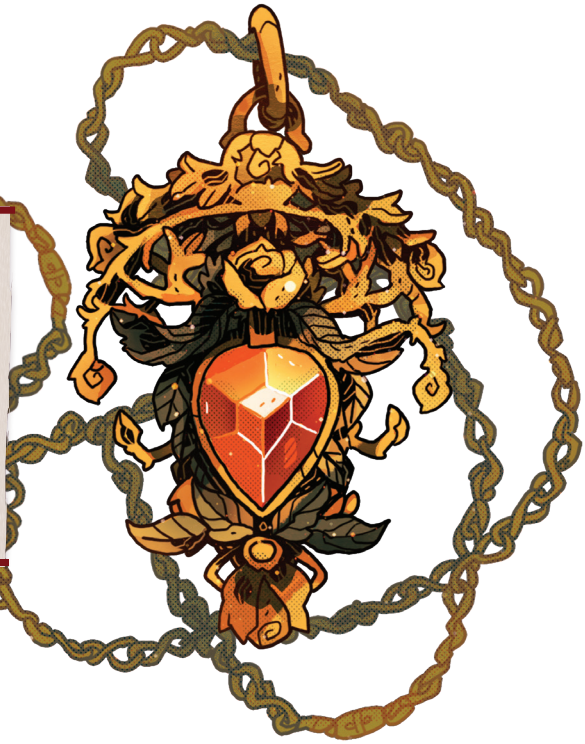
Ring, legendary

While wearing this ring, you can use an action to cast the *glibness* spell from it. Once you do so, you can't cast the spell again until dawn.

Clearglass Pendant

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)

While you are attuned to this pendant and have fewer than half your hit points, you can use your reaction when you take damage to become invisible, as per the spell *invisibility*, for up to 1 hour. After this duration, the pendant loses its luster and becomes nonmagical.



Magician's Cape

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)

This cape masks the magical auras originating from you. While attuned to it, any spells you cast or magic items you carry appear nonmagical to spells and magical effects, such as *detect magic*, that detect magical auras. Artifacts are unaffected by this effect.

AKKADIA

HUMAN ILLUSIONIST

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 13 (16 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 91 (14d8 + 28)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Int +10, Wis +6

Skills Arcana +9, Deception +8, History +9, Perception +5, Performance +8, Persuasion +8, Sleight of Hand +6

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Draconic, Dwarvish, Elvish

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Special Equipment. Akkadia carries a *clearglass pendant**, a *ring of protection*, a *magician's cape**, and a *ring of glibness**.

Coordinated Casting. Akkadia can ready a spell of 1st level or higher as a bonus action on her turn. Doing so counts as casting the spell, so Akkadia can't cast another spell on her turn, except for a cantrip with a casting time of 1 action.

Magic Resistance. Akkadia has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Spellcasting. Akkadia is an 14th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). Akkadia has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, mage hand, minor illusion, prestidigitation, shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *arcanist's magic aura*^, *detect magic, disguise self, mage armor*^

2nd level (3 slots): *blur, misty step, scorching ray, suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *hypnotic pattern, lightning bolt, major image*

4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility, phantasmal killer*

5th level (2 slots): *cone of cold, mislead, passwall*

6th level (1 slot): *chain lightning, programmed illusion*

^Akkadia casts these spells on herself before combat.

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Reactions

Spell Reflection (Recharges after a Long Rest). Akkadia takes no damage from a spell that hits her. Instead, the spell's caster takes half the damage that the spell would have dealt. Akkadia must be able to see the spell's caster in order to use this reaction.

NOTE

The stat block provided is for a single Domarov triplet. When all three are encountered together, the encounter would be considered CR 11.

STEINHEER

CARSUS

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 002	ALIAS: Tyrant of the Forest
SIZE: Huge	TYPE: Plant
DANGER LEVEL: 11	DEMEANOR: Desperately Arrogant

WARNING:

KEEP LIMBS AWAY FROM MOUTH

NOTES:

A real horticultural conundrum. This thing hates its own offspring, though. So maybe we just wait it out? Love it when a problem takes care of itself...

-Agent Flora Verde, Department of Plant-Based Terrors

Concept: Josh Heath
Writing & Game Design: Josh Heath, TR Rowe, Jordan Richer
Original Cover: Henrik Rosenborg
Illustrations: Kayla Cline

Terror Among the Trees

> **Eyewitness account by Barnaby Brunwald, Farmer**
>
> *I was just a lad the first time I saw an infestation of brown hats—they can eat everything you own in just a few days.*
>
> *We drove them off, but they kept coming back. If you catch one of the young ones, you can burn them out, but full-sized, fire just doesn't seem to phase them. You gotta pour acid on the buggers to really get them gone. We've still got some acid out in the shed if they ever come back.*
>
> *I made the mistake of trying to stop the vermin horde at its source, and what I found terrified me. The tree those creatures sprouted from spoke directly to my mind. I still have nightmares.*

Carsus, Tyrant of the Forest

Carsus is a brown hat tree—an evil plant who greedily insists on control of his grove. As an elder of the **brown hats** he has tyrannically reigned over his forest for hundreds of years, manipulating the land around him to his own benefit. Throughout the centuries the crafty tree has built a network of servants, both willing and unwilling, and taken great pains to ensure none of his offspring grow large enough to challenge his authority. Carsus's tight grip on his grove has started to fade—he is afflicted by the deadly fungal infection mage's bane, and there's no cure in sight.

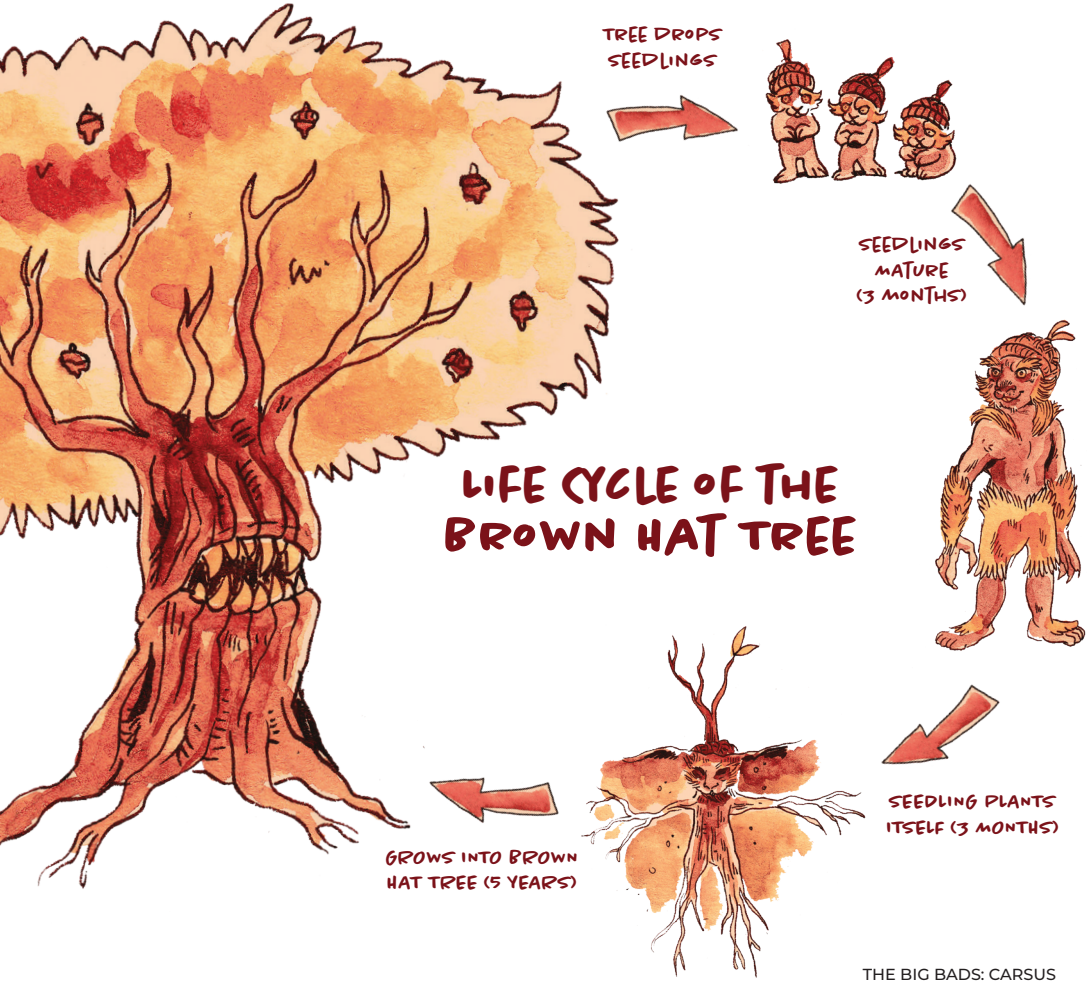
Tyrants of the Forest. Brown hat trees are viewed as the natural enemies of treants, and the two have fought long wars against one another. Brown hat trees have an often insatiable hunger and prefer cultivated fruits and vegetables, posing a major threat to nearby farms. If they cannot acquire such food, they will use their offspring to hunt.

Carsus used to eat in moderation and maintain "arrangements" with growers to help keep his food in steady supply. One such deal was with a village of halflings: in exchange for the majority of their apple crop, he wouldn't raze their settlement. However, he recently broke his word by slaughtering the entire village when they could offer no relief from the infection he is fighting.

Life Cycle of the Brown Hat Tree. When brown hat seedlings first fall from a branch they are tiny, no larger than an acorn. The tops of their heads resemble brown knit caps. Adolescent brown hats have sharp teeth, red-brown fur, and range from two to three feet tall. The adolescents eat voraciously until they grow large enough to take root. As adult trees their fur hardens into bark, their teeth multiply, and they dominate the surrounding territory via telepathic control of their spawn. Due to discord among brown hats as a race, full fledged adults are a rarity. Those that do grow into adult trees are effectively immortal.

Typically, individual brown hat trees avoid communicating and collaborating with one another, due to the vast amount of resources each grove requires and the violence that proximity often inspires. Some years ago, a trio of elder brown hats tried to unite their territories and form one large cooperative grove, but they fell to infighting and eventually created a devastating war that nearly wiped out the entire race. Since then brown hat groves remain insular, and elder trees are cautious when it comes to the creation and control of their spawn.

Preoccupied by the burgeoning fungus and an unending quest for food, Carsus has created more spawn than he is comfortable with. A few spawn have even gotten far enough away to take root on their own, and their independence infuriates him. On some level, though, he hopes that at least one survives into adulthood to ensure some form of a legacy after he dies.



Roleplaying Carsus

Carsus is dying. He is nearly 800 years old and infected with the incurable fungus called Mage's Bane. In an effort to stave off the fungus he is eating profusely, and he's had to drop hundreds of seedlings to scavenge more food for him. Before the infection diminished his power, he was a force to be reckoned with. He is now a shadow of what he used to be.

Brown hat trees tend to be aggressive and vicious by nature. Due to his illness, Carsus is even more ornery than normal. Refusing to speak aloud, he uses his telepathy like a whip, striking out at those around him in fits of rage. His telepathic voice is jabbing and deep. When he does speak aloud, the sound is as abrasive as cracking wood.

While Carsus is never kind, he can empathize with anyone afflicted by an illness. Carsus might be convinced to use some of his waning power to help someone else, but only if he believes the action will also benefit him.

Too prideful to ask for help, Carsus will lie to get what he wants. He's not a good liar, though, and often resorts to bullying instead. Clearing out the fungus is the only thing he cares about.

Carsus's pride in his appearance has been severely diminished, as a sickening fungus has turned his once-proud bark sallow. Any comments about the unsightly infection will send the vain brown hat tree into a rage.

Carsus' Tactics

As a powerful telepath, Carsus invades the dreams of those who sleep in his forest, pushing them to exhaustion so they're easier to manipulate. He'll do this for as many days as he can, attempting to herd adventurers away from his grove while making them more and more exhausted from nightmares. In direct combat, Carsus uses a mix of spells and minions to keep attackers from getting into melee range, focusing on area effects that hit as many targets as possible. Usually he starts with *call lightning*, *wall of fire*, and *wall of stone*. To protect himself, he's willing to sacrifice his minions.

Carsus' Traits

Ideal. "Obtaining a cure for this fungus is worth any sacrifice."

Bond. "Nothing is as grand as I, but those who serve me deserve their share. At least until I eat them."

Flaw. "My own selfishness makes it difficult for me to believe anyone would help me without wanting something in return."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Carsus in your campaign.

Oaken Infestation. A large infestation of brown hats has ravaged two towns, and their citizens flee to nearby cities.

Helping the Villainous Tree. In an effort to cure his spreading fungus, Carsus sends his spawn to find a remedy. One such spawn encounters the adventuring party and asks for their assistance.

Bringing the Forest Down with Him. Carsus is confident he is going to die. He discovered the fungus he is infected by can spread to other trees and even humanoids. Now he's vengefully producing and deploying as many tainted brown hats as possible, to infect everyone and anything he can.

The Grove of Carsus

Carsus is one of the oldest brown hat trees in existence, and his grove is in a deep wood. Treants used to make the forest their home, but Carsus drove them away. Animals of all kinds give the massive brown hat tree a wide berth. Over the centuries Carsus has carefully cultivated his grove so that he can grow as tall and strong as possible to defend himself, if required. Carsus psychically controls his brown hat spawn and sends them out to collect food from distant farms and villages.

Lair Actions

Carsus's meticulously maintained grove provides him access to several lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Carsus can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects. He can't use the same lair action two rounds in a row:

- Carsus casts *entangle* as a 5th-level spell against all creatures within 180 feet of him.
- Any creature within 30 feet of Carsus must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be compelled to take a full move action away from him.
- Carsus releases 1d10 **brown hats** or a single **brown hat seedling swarm**. These creatures make attacks immediately and otherwise count as normal brown hats.

Regional Effects

The region containing Carsus has become corrupted by the tree's evil presence:

- Animals are very skittish around Carsus, and the presence of small creatures tends to be sparse. Any attempt to *speak with animals* requires a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check to convince the animal to talk.
- A brown hat tree can sense the presence of intelligent creatures up to 1 mile from its grove. Carsus will send his brown hat spawn out to determine if the intruders are edible.
- Carsus can inflict horrible nightmares on any creature that is within 5 miles of his grove. Anyone that takes a long rest within 5 miles of Carsus must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or take 1d10 psychic damage, suffer one level of exhaustion, and become unable to regain arcane spells for the next 24 hours.

"Mage's Bane", Fungal Infection

This potent fungus, known as "Mage's Bane," is a slow-growing infection that brown hat trees cannot feel, which makes it difficult for them to treat the disease when it's still in the early stages. Most brown hats become infected via their spawn devouring small portions of the fungus while foraging. The fungus has a natural immunity to magic, which makes it nearly impossible to cleanse the infected brown hat using magical means. Mage's Bane kills most brown hat trees within two to five years of infection; regular use of magic by the infected speeds up the process, killing frequent magic-users within a year.

Mage's Bane has an initial benefit for brown hat trees, but that benefit quickly becomes a drawback. The fungus increases the inherent magic a brown hat tree can cast, providing them access to spells one level higher than they can normally cast. However, their magic eventually becomes unreliable.

While very rare, it is possible for the fungus to infect other creatures aside from brown hats, if they ingest enough of the fungus. Any creature infected by Mage's Bane who is capable of spellcasting gains the following trait:

Mage's Bane Curse. Each morning roll a d10. On a 1, the infected creature loses access to all spells until the following dawn. On a 10, the infected creature gains access to a spell slot one level higher than its highest casting level, or an additional 9th-level spell slot if it already has access to 9th-level spells. For example, a wizard capable of casting 3rd-level spells would gain one 4th-level spell slot. The spell slot remains until the creature takes a long rest.

Brown Hat Seedling Swarm

Medium swarm of Tiny plants, neutral evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 22 (5d8)
Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4 (−3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	4 (−3)	7 (−2)	1 (−5)

Damage Vulnerabilities acid
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages —
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a tiny plant. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Actions

Stings. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing damage, or 5 (2d4) piercing damage if the swarm has half its hit points or fewer.

Brown Hat

Small plant, neutral evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 7 (2d6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (−1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	8 (−1)	12 (+1)	6 (−2)

Damage Vulnerabilities acid
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, fire, piercing
Damage Immunities cold
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Skills Athletics +5
Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Sylvan
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Pack Tactics. The brown hat has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the brown hat's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally is not incapacitated.

Actions

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (2d4 − 1) slashing damage.

CARSUS

BROWN HAT TREE (CYCLOPSIS PHRUNNUSCAPPUS)

Huge plant, neutral evil

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)
Hit Points 243 (18d12 + 126)
Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	4 (-3)	24 (+7)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)

Skills Perception +6, Persuasion +6

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, fire, piercing

Damage Immunities cold

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, exhaustion, prone

Senses tremorsense 160 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Sylvan, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

False Appearance. While Carsus remains motionless, he is indistinguishable from a normal tree.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Carsus fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Regeneration. Carsus regains 10 hit points at the start of his turn. If he takes acid damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of his next turn. Carsus dies only if he starts his turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Unreliable Magic. Due to an aggressive fungal infection, Carsus's magic is slightly unreliable, but occasionally more potent. Every morning roll a d10. On a 1, Carsus loses access to all spells until the following dawn. On a 2, he loses his 2nd-level slots, on a 3, he loses his 3rd-level slots, on a 4, he loses his 4th-level spell slots, and on a 5, he loses his 5th-level spell slots. A result of 6 to 9 has no effect. If a 10 is rolled, Carsus gains access to one 6th-level spell slot for the day.

Spellcasting. Carsus is a 10th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He requires no material components to cast spells. He has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, mending, produce flame, shillelagh*

1st level (4 slots): *entangle, fog cloud, healing word, thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *flaming sphere, hold person, spike growth*

3rd level (3 slots): *call lightning, dispel magic, plant growth*

4th level (3 slots): *blight, ice storm, wall of fire*

5th level (2 slots): *insect plague, wall of stone*

Actions

Branch Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target.
Hit: 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage.

Telepathic Control. Carsus targets one humanoid within 30 feet of him that he can see. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed for 1 day. The charmed target obeys Carsus's telepathic commands. If the target suffers any harm or receives a command that could result in harm to itself, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success. If the target successfully saves against the effect or if the effect on it ends, the target is immune to Carsus's Telepathic Control for the next 24 hours. Carsus may have up to four targets charmed at once. If he charms an additional target beyond this limit, the effect on his first target ends.

Legendary Actions

Carsus can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Carsus regains spent legendary actions every turn.

Branch Slam. Carsus makes an attack with his branch slam.

Cast a Spell (Costs 2 Actions). Carsus casts a spell from his list of prepared spells, using a spell slot as normal.

DANIEL

BIG BAD BUREAU CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 001	ALIAS: The Failed Flesh Golem
SIZE: Large	TYPE: Construct
DANGER LEVEL: 15	DEMEANOR: Aggressively Lonely

WARNING:

DOES NOT RESPECT PERSONAL SPACE

NOTES:

This thing is a nightmare. It makes me never want to be hugged by anything ever again. Emotionally manipulative. Keep your distance and don't let it tug on your heartstrings (or your limbs.) Yikes.

-Chief Runcible Scowler

Concept: Andrea Bruce
Writing & Game Design: Andrea Bruce, Ricardo Evangelho, Jordan Richer
Original Cover: Svetoslav Petrov
Illustrations: Kayla Cline

ITS JOY, YOUR DEMISE

A gentle breeze blows through a small opening in the wall. Daniel does not stir within its dungeon cell. It would take more than a puff of air to awaken the golem, motivate it to do something. Knowing its nature, this is best—still and resting. It wasn't always like this. There was a time when the golem wasn't quiet. Its loud, metallic movements brought violent nightmares and twisted tableaux.

You don't want Daniel to do anything. Correction, if Daniel did anything you wouldn't want for much longer.

Daniel's memory is long. Long ago, ages before the golem was named, before it was imprisoned, Daniel learned how to remember. There on the mesa's hard ground, folded over itself, it started to remember, the sensation of its flesh rubbery and moist. For generations, Daniel remained on the stone plateau. If Daniel was lucky, a curious carnivore scouting the golem's desolate surroundings would nudge the golem to evaluate if it was a tasty meal. Sometimes the animal moved the malformed mass just enough. Nerves firing, Daniel felt something and remembered.

The span of time between these infrequent chance encounters was antagonizing. The golem hungered to feel more. What if it didn't need assistance? What if it could animate itself? What if—the aware pile shifted. *Ooh!* It shifted again. *Ugh!* Again *Ah—ouch!*

Pain shot through the golem. *That's new.*

Years later, Daniel would understand the offender was a sharp rock, but that never mattered to Daniel. What mattered was that it felt. Daniel was changed. Sure, the other sensations were fun, but this was all consuming. The golem craved more.

Patiently and with practice, a motivated Daniel struggled to understand its body. Crude limbs, malformed trunk, and a soft dome meant locomotion was not easy or elegant, but grace wasn't necessary. What was important was the golem could feel.

At first, rocks and other elements of its environment sufficed. Daniel harmed itself, and the pain brought purpose to the golem's existence. Disappointingly, the agony eventually became mild discomfort and therefore uninteresting. Daniel had unwittingly adapted.

The golem sought out new inspiration. Lusher lands speckled with populated areas provided Daniel with the tools it required. For some time, inserting sharp metal objects into its body brought on new happiness. Blades, needles, forks, razors, anything that would tear flesh, the golem embraced with its body. The heavy clanging sounds Daniel's trinkets made when it moved pleased the golem. Inevitably, the intoxication from piercing its flesh faded. Discouraged and without direction, Daniel inhabited the woodlands near a modest settlement.

Mutilated from its thrill-seeking habits, the golem was a disgusting sight: cartilage and sinew corrupted by metal. The monster's frightening appearance was used to caution overly eager youth yearning for adventure: *If you hear the sound of steel on steel, you had better run.*

Having grown up with tales of the flesh-and-metal monster, one heartbroken, unlucky soul developed an interest in the creature. Initially, the melancholy human studied the creature from afar, but his observations did not go unnoticed. The golem, now dulled from years of a mundane existence, was entertained by its admirer.

Daniel wasn't very familiar with humans. Although it didn't know why, the golem knew living things feared him. But for some reason, this young man wasn't wary.

Concerned that it might scare him, Daniel did not approach the human. It let the man, hidden among the trees, feel safe, until he became accustomed to the golem's presence. As they got comfortable with each other, the distance between them diminished. Eventually, trusting the golem wouldn't harm him, the human left his leafy cover and sat a few feet from Daniel, intently gazing at the golem. Twilight to dusk, this became their ritual until one day, the admirer leapt up and decisively stepped close to the golem.

"I had a brother," the human began as he stood in the golem's shadow. "He… he… everyone loved him." The human looked at the ground as he choked back tears and continued, "I tried to save him, but...life's not fair. He, Daniel, was quiet. I can tell you have a gentle spirit." The human looked up to where the golem's face would have been, if it had one, and smiled kindly. "Just like Daniel."

The golem, with only a basic grasp of language, didn't fully know what to make of the human's words. Daniel's brother's rapid breaths warmed the golem's skin. Five fingers nervously reached out and touched the left side of the golem's chest. The creature flinched. Nothing had ever touched it so carefully. Marvelled by the unlikely connection it felt with its new companion, the golem shifted slightly closer. Another human hand reached out and touched it. The human exhaled the name, "Daniel…"

The golem couldn't contain its glee. It was going to show this new friend all the wondrous things it had learned. It had taken eons to perfect joy, and now it was going to share all of it.

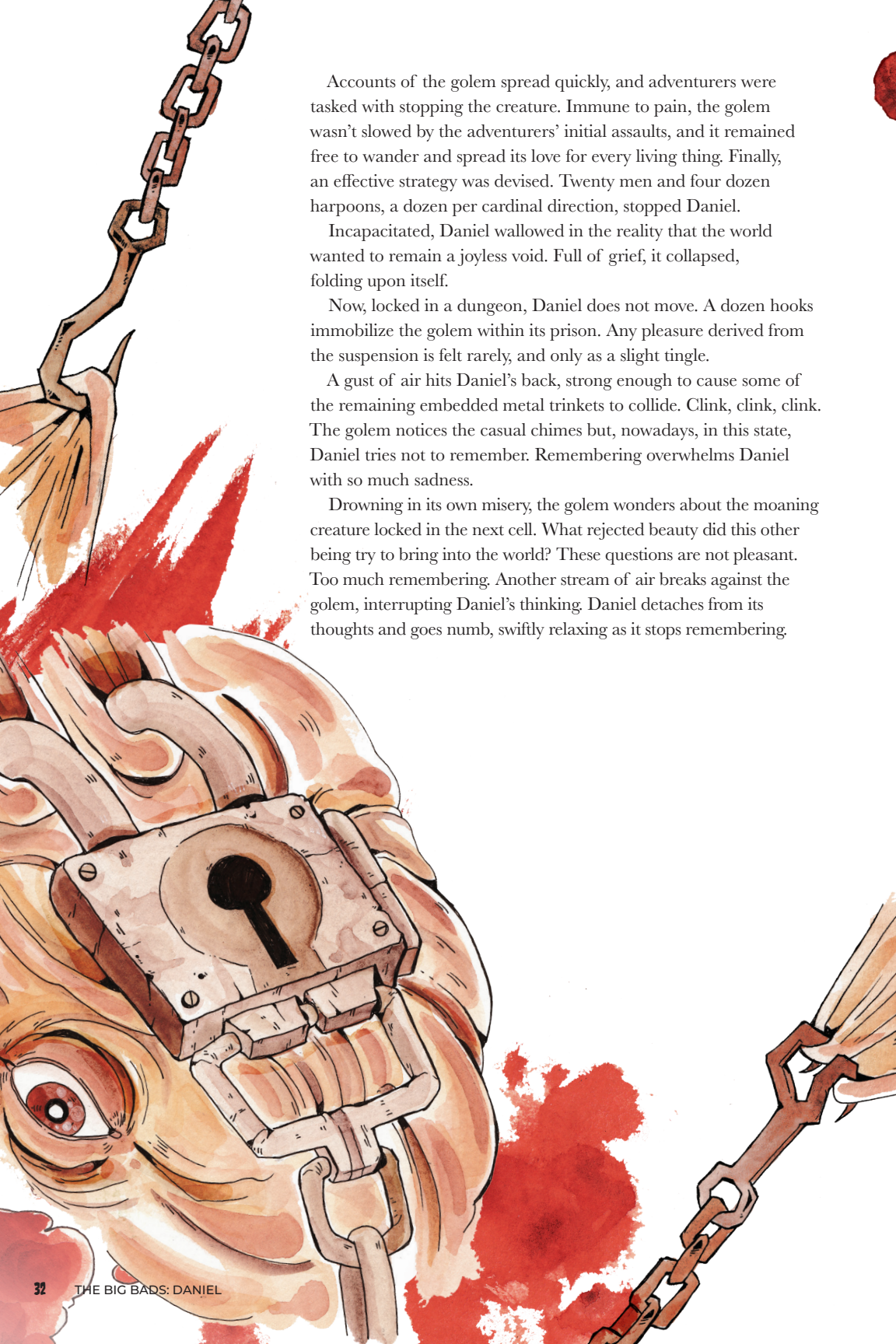
Daniel didn't hesitate. It enveloped the human, its clumsy arms wrapping warmly around the man.

The human's eyes went wide. "Daniel!" he cried out. *This is good.* Tears rolled down its friend's cheeks. This did not concern the golem. It knew humans cried in times of happiness. *Yes, this is good.* The golem pressed its body into the human, its shiny metal collection puncturing, and warm human fluids drenched the golem. The human shook while Daniel celebrated its affection for its new friend. It pressed harder.

Abruptly, the human stopped moving. Daniel let go of the body, slowly recognizing that its friend was no longer there. Stepping back, it admired the remains scattered on the forest floor. The lifeless corpse was a mess. Strips of skin and other human matter were torn carelessly from the bone frame. The ground was stained and wet with things that were supposed to be on the inside.

For a second, Daniel was sad that its friend was gone. But then, as it considered the human's expression, it became overwhelmed with a boundless delight. A wide-eyed, teary gaze eternally lingered on its friend's face, and Daniel knew that he had died blissfully. This moment transformed the golem. Even though the golem could no longer feel any awe-inspiring tactile sensations, it could bring these gifts to others.

With new intentions, Daniel was determined to bring joy to all it met. A bear in the woods, a surprised mountain ogre, a small dwarven village—Daniel shared what it had learned.



Accounts of the golem spread quickly, and adventurers were tasked with stopping the creature. Immune to pain, the golem wasn't slowed by the adventurers' initial assaults, and it remained free to wander and spread its love for every living thing. Finally, an effective strategy was devised. Twenty men and four dozen harpoons, a dozen per cardinal direction, stopped Daniel.

Incapacitated, Daniel wallowed in the reality that the world wanted to remain a joyless void. Full of grief, it collapsed, folding upon itself.

Now, locked in a dungeon, Daniel does not move. A dozen hooks immobilize the golem within its prison. Any pleasure derived from the suspension is felt rarely, and only as a slight tingle.

A gust of air hits Daniel's back, strong enough to cause some of the remaining embedded metal trinkets to collide. Clink, clink, clink. The golem notices the casual chimes but, nowadays, in this state, Daniel tries not to remember. Remembering overwhelms Daniel with so much sadness.

Drowning in its own misery, the golem wonders about the moaning creature locked in the next cell. What rejected beauty did this other being try to bring into the world? These questions are not pleasant. Too much remembering. Another stream of air breaks against the golem, interrupting Daniel's thinking. Daniel detaches from its thoughts and goes numb, swiftly relaxing as it stops remembering.

Daniel, the Failed Flesh Golem

Failed Experiment. The result of a failed attempt to create a flesh golem, **Daniel** is a unique creature. It wanders as though it were lost, a rolling mass of flesh and bone, accumulating debris as it goes.

Daniel has a limited sense of self. It knows itself to be Daniel from its first encounter with humans, but beyond that it doesn't know or understand its existence or the limitations of its being.

Raw Emotions. Since being abandoned by its creators, Daniel has developed a skewed view of joy. Its first sensations were pain, which it now equates with positive feelings. Daniel believes that other creatures haven't felt pure joy like it has. It believes it can spread this joy if only these creatures would trust it. Daniel doesn't intend to harm anyone; it thinks maiming is a kindness.

Daniel has no capacity to manage its emotions. As soon as it senses that a creature is not enjoying its gift of kindness, Daniel becomes despondent and volatile. Its only form of communication is through transmitting its emotions, and when Daniel gets into this state, its psychic emanations can turn deadly.

Roleplaying Daniel

Daniel's only true drive is to spread its version of joy and happiness to others. If no creatures are nearby, Daniel attempts to lure creatures to it by sharing emotions and memories telepathically in all directions in hopes of hooking someone with its lonely pleas.

Daniel does not immediately come off as aggressive. To an onlooker it will seem like a mindless monster that, if ignored, will go away.

On a simplistic level, Daniel is aware that most creatures are afraid of it. Daniel attempts to send soothing and calm memories to nearby creatures, but its twisted outlook means that these images are terrifying and strange to anyone receiving them.

Daniel's emotional state can quickly devolve into that of a petulant or scared child. If it is unable to share its joy it will stop whatever it is doing and tremble, emitting psychic energy of its pain and sadness to all who can feel it.

Daniel's Tactics

Inevitably, any prolonged interaction with Daniel will end in combat. Daniel is almost always surprised that a fight has started. Unless it has previously been harmed by its attackers, the only action it will take on its first turn is Emotional Lure to try and convince someone to come closer.

Once combat is in full swing, Daniel will mindlessly threaten and attack whatever creature is nearest, attempting to pull it in and engulf it. Daniel has no capacity to think strategically and no interest in fleeing. It will fight until the death, taking every opportunity to inflict "joy" on its attackers.

As soon as Daniel is reduced to 20 hit points or fewer, it locks down into a ball of sadness and fear. The psychic energies it radiates are extremely volatile, and anyone caught inside will feel Daniel's sorrow wash over them.

Daniel's Traits

Ideal. "I have discovered unimaginable joy and want to share it with everyone."

Bond. "All creatures, great and small, deserve to feel my joy."

Flaw. "When someone refuses to feel what I feel, I am inconsolable."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Daniel in your campaign.

The Collector. The party is approached by a stranger who introduces themselves as a collector of rare and unique creatures. One of the creatures in their collection has freed itself and is wreaking havoc in the collector's underground menagerie. This creature is Daniel, and the collector offers the party a tidy sum to recapture it—alive.

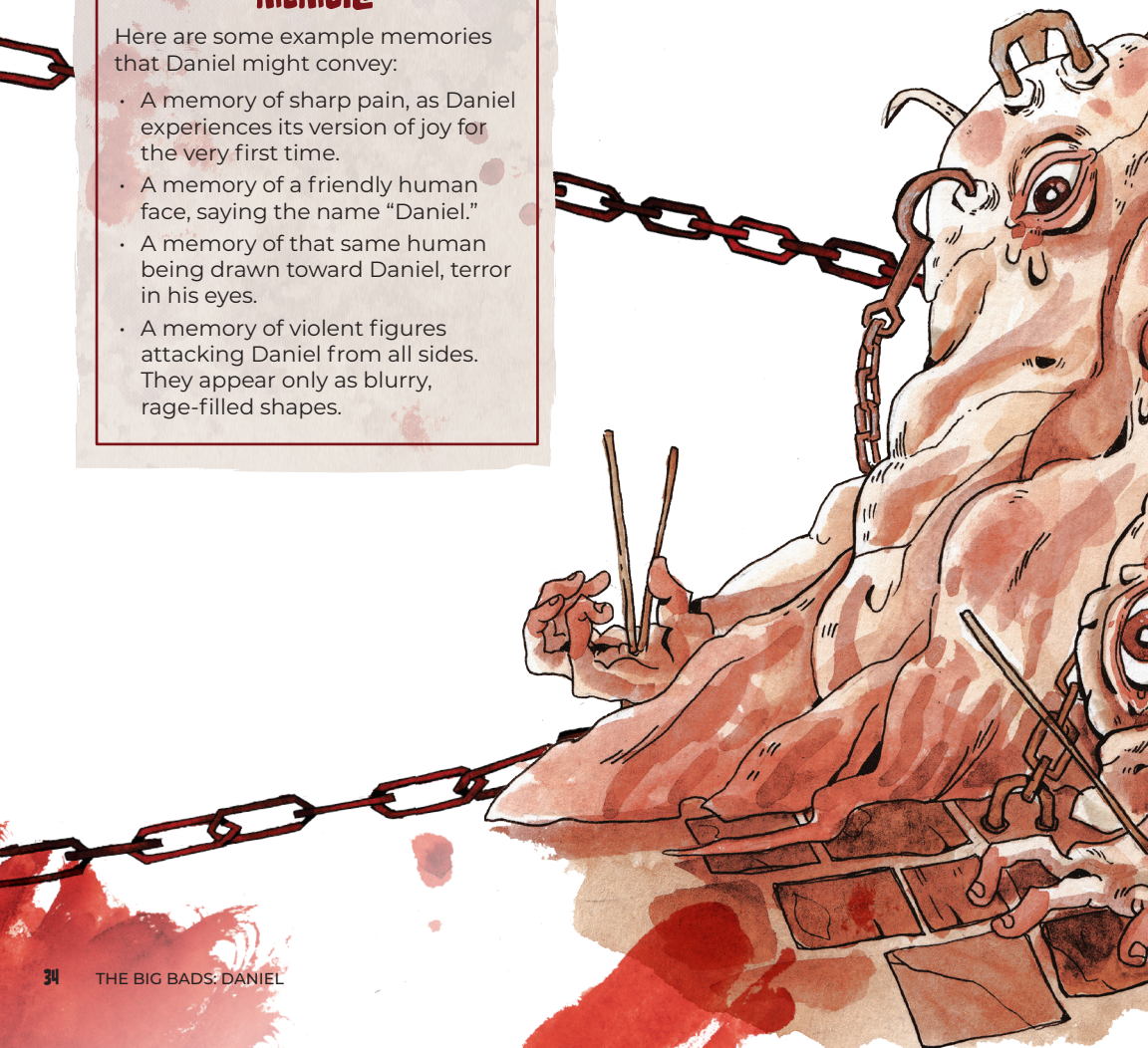
In the Wild. A small village is wracked with fear due to several strange disappearances. A desperate shop owner hires the party to investigate what happened to her recently missing husband. After some searching, the party will come across Daniel in the woods, in the process of inflicting its "joy" on the injured man.

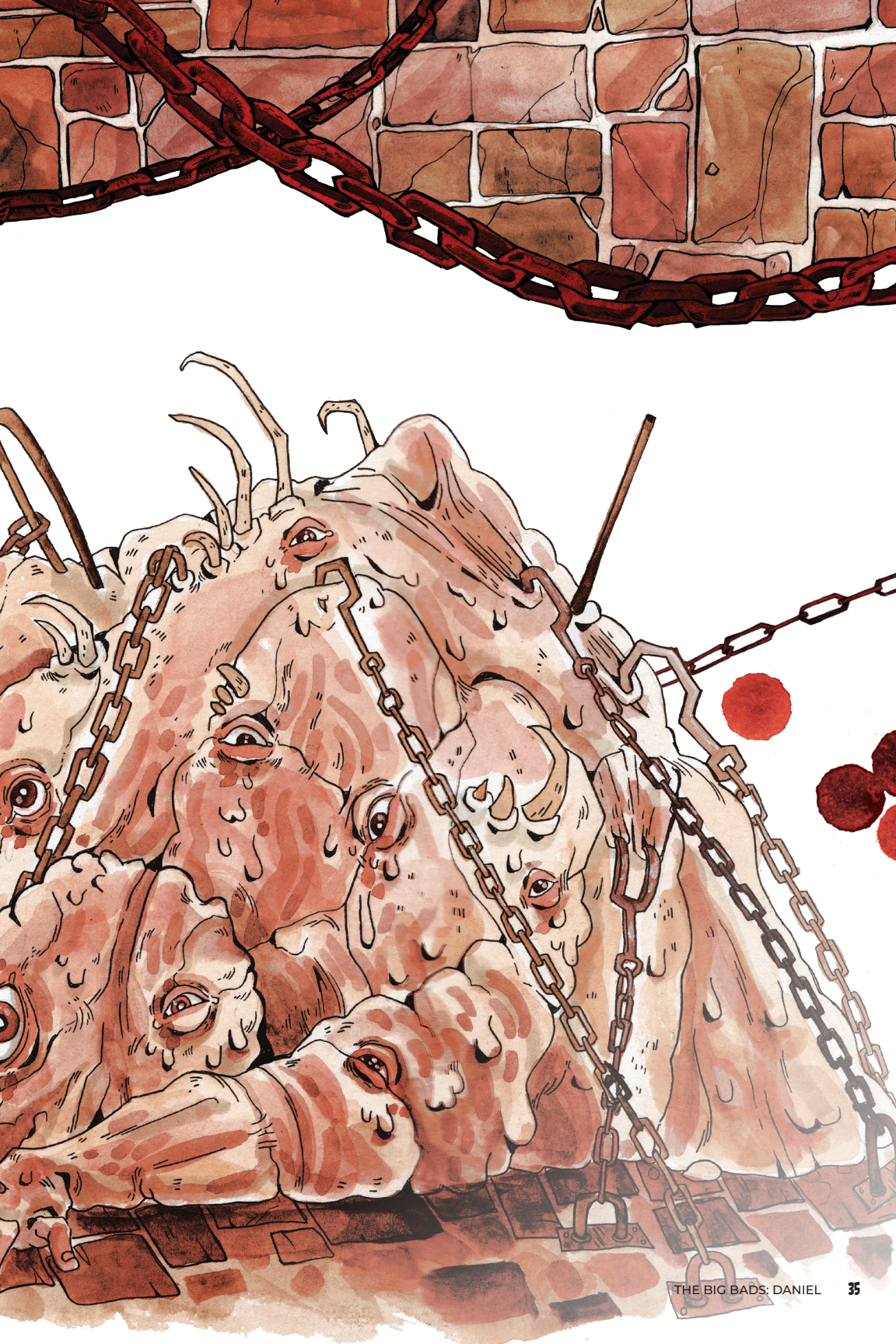
Distress Call. While in transit between adventures, the party members all feel pangs of remorse and suffering, and an incomprehensible call for help. Tracing the source of the call, characters start to notice a lack of birdsong, of any life at all. As they near Daniel the feelings grow. Will they help ease its pain or put it out of its misery?

Memory

Here are some example memories that Daniel might convey:

- A memory of sharp pain, as Daniel experiences its version of joy for the very first time.
- A memory of a friendly human face, saying the name "Daniel."
- A memory of that same human being drawn toward Daniel, terror in his eyes.
- A memory of violent figures attacking Daniel from all sides. They appear only as blurry, rage-filled shapes.





DANIEL

THE FAILED FLESH GOLEM

Large construct, neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 157 (15d10 + 75)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	11 (+0)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	5 (−3)

Saving Throws Str +11, Con +10, Wis +5

Skills Athletics +11, History +6

Damage Immunities poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands Common but can't speak, telepathy 60 ft. (can only transmit memories)

Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

Immutable Form. Daniel is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Daniel fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. Daniel has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. Daniel's weapon attacks are magical.

Thick Hide. Anytime Daniel is hit by a melee weapon that inflicts piercing damage, the attacker must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or have the weapon get stuck in Daniel's hide. A creature can use its action to try and remove a stuck weapon by making a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check while within 5 feet of Daniel. Any arrows or bolts that are removed from Daniel break immediately when removed.

Unbridled Emotions. Whenever Daniel starts its turn with 60 hit points or fewer, roll a d6. On a 6, Daniel goes berserk. On each of its turns while berserk, Daniel attacks the nearest creature it can see. If it cannot use its movement speed to reach a creature, Daniel attacks the nearest object, with preference for objects smaller than itself. Once Daniel goes berserk, it continues to do so until it is destroyed or regains all its hit points.

If Daniel is reduced to 20 hit points or fewer, it stops taking actions or reactions. Instead, Daniel takes on a defensive form, increasing its AC to 17 and radiating a field of anxiety-inducing psychic energy. Any creature who moves into or starts its turn within 10 feet of Daniel while it is radiating psychic energy must make a DC 14 Intelligence saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) psychic damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

Actions

Multiattack. Daniel makes two slam attacks. If at least one of the slam attacks is successful, Daniel can also use his engulf.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 16).

Shrapnel (Recharge 5–6). All creatures within 20 feet of Daniel must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 20 (8d4) piercing damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

Engulf. Daniel engulfs a Medium or smaller creature grappled by it. The engulfed target is blinded, restrained, unable to breathe, and must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw at the start of each of Daniel's turns or take 19 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage. If Daniel moves, the engulfed target moves with it. Daniel can have only one creature engulfed at a time.

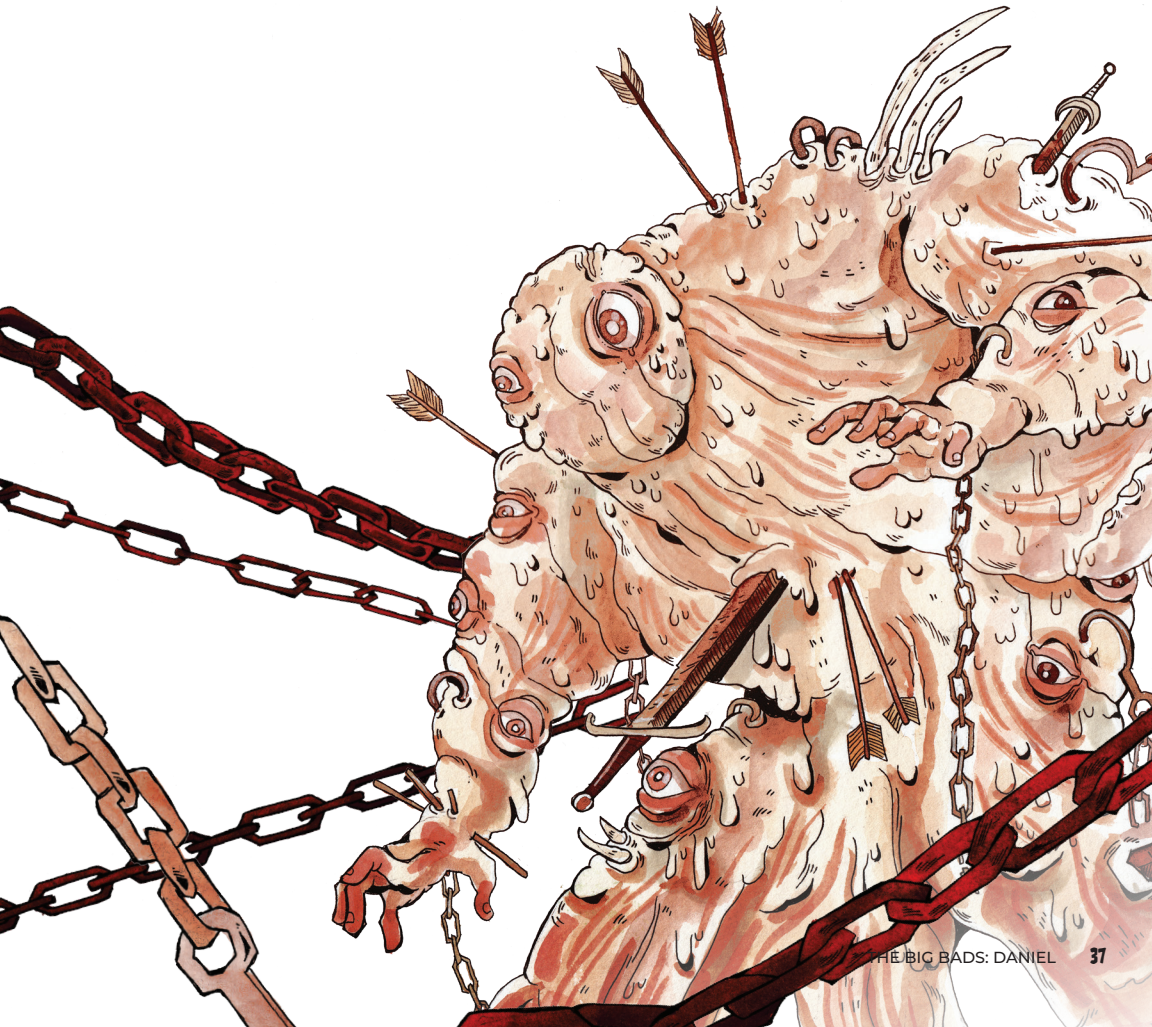
Emotional Lure. Daniel chooses a creature within 60 feet of it that it can see. The target creature must succeed on a DC 14 Intelligence saving throw or be charmed by Daniel for 1 minute. While charmed in this manner, if the charmed creature is more than 10 feet away from Daniel, the target must move on its turn toward Daniel by the most direct route, working toward getting within 10 feet of Daniel. If a source other than Daniel deals damage to the charmed creature, the charmed creature can repeat the saving throw, ending the charm effect immediately on a success. If Daniel deals damage to a creature it has charmed, the charm effect ends immediately.

Legendary Actions

Daniel can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Daniel regains all spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Slam. Daniel makes a slam attack.

Squeeze (2 Actions). Daniel crushes a creature it has engulfed. The creature must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 33 (6d8 + 6) piercing damage on a failure, or half as much on a success. The physical contact invigorates Daniel, and it recovers hit points equal to the damage dealt. If this damage reduces the engulfed creature to 0 hit points, the hit points Daniel recovers are doubled and its shrapnel action is recharged.



EXAXIA

BIG BAD BUREAU CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 023	ALIAS: The Thorn Witch
SIZE: Large	TYPE: Plant
DANGER LEVEL: 8	DEMEANOR: Charmingly Predatory

WARNING:

DON'T STOP TO SMELL THIS FLOWER

NOTES:

Life everlasting, but at what cost? Relentless nature mixed with spiteful, angry rage—a powerful combination. I have to admit there is something alluring about this creature, though.

-Agent Flora Verde, Department of Plant-Based Terrors

Concept: Jasmine Bhullar
Writing & Game Design: Jasmine Bhullar
Original Cover: Kathleen O'Hara
Illustrations: Alex Stone

NONE DARE RESIST HER!

Exaxia, The Thorn Witch

Exaxia De Floris was once a powerful but reclusive elven noble, infamous for dabbling in the darkest of magics—necromancy. Her hunger to control the forces of life and death knew no bounds, with Exaxia often stealing from and crushing those who hoarded necromantic secrets. Over time Exaxia became a force to be reckoned with, feared by all and particularly hated by her rivals.

Noble No Longer. Exaxia's overconfidence and obsession would prove to be her downfall. At the height of her powers, she decided to raid and destroy the arcane laboratory of a promising young practitioner of the necromantic arts. However, this temptingly easy target was actually being used as bait by a coalition of her rivals who had crafted an alliance to destroy her. She discovered their arcane trap too late, and the devastating ritual left her mortally wounded. Broken and bleeding, Exaxia staggered back to her tower deep in the woods.

Exaxia lurched into her laboratory, smashing jars and vials to the floor as she desperately searched through shelves of artifacts she had gathered over years of study and theft. Among the broken glass she finally found what she was looking for: a necrotic item known as a *carrion heart seed**. Realizing that her frail form was not going to survive her injuries, Exaxia, driven by spite against the necromancers who had orchestrated her death, performed her final ritual. She grasped the seed and planted it deep in her chest. The seed took hold and squeezed the last breath from Exaxia's dying lungs. As she lay dead, surrounded by the shattered remains of her life's dark work, dozens of spiders began pouring forth from the *carrion heart seed**. The cursed arachnids stitched up her wounds with little care for her former beauty. What had been Exaxia began to grow into something new—the Thorn Witch.

Though her tower crumbled, the seed bloomed in dark seclusion for decades, thriving in Exaxia's corpse, enriched with malice and seething rage. What eventually emerged was a nightmarish, cruel creature, twisted and hardened into a more malevolent creature of the dark than even Exaxia had been as a necromancer.

Only glimpses of Exaxia's former self remain in her current state. The *carrion heart seed** has long since drawn all the nutrients it can from Exaxia's corpse, but her spite and sense of superiority remain. Driven by the carrion heart's natural survival instinct and hunger for warmth and nourishment, combined with the remnants of Exaxia's dying rage, the Thorn Witch is a twisted shadow of her former self.

Sickeningly Sweet. Adventurers and scholars speak of the Thorn Witch in hushed tones around their campfires, sharing rumors of a monster they hope isn't real. Little is known about the beautiful arachnid wretch who wanders the depths of the woods, except for tales of her alluring scent that a few have caught faintly wafting on the breeze. Those who go to investigate the source do not return.

The Carrion Heart Plant

During her travels, Exaxia discovered one of the natural world's most potent necromantic artifacts, the *carrion heart seed**. The plant it comes from, the Carrion Heart, is very rare and grows only in cursed and desecrated graveyards. To tend to itself, the plant hypnotizes an army of spiders that bring the plant the blood it needs to grow until it eventually can produce a single, tremendous seed, the size of a heart.

Exaxia emits the sweetest of perfumes in the hopes of drawing in her prey. Once close, they become hypnotized by her overwhelming aroma, and she is free to feast upon their minds and flesh. Her new undead, botanical state has left her less nimble than she was in life. Her mangled legs and stiff bark-like skin make pursuit difficult, so she relies on her aromatic pollen to bring her prey to her instead.

The Dark Deity. Desperate denizens of the woods occasionally seek out Exaxia for her blessings. Some believe there are rare herbs growing on and around her that can cure otherwise incurable diseases. Only great anguish would drive someone to seek out the Thorn Witch. No one knows what becomes of these seekers since no one has returned to civilization after making this desperate pilgrimage.

It could be that the old tales are true and that these sad souls receive her gifts in return for years of servitude. More likely, they are brainwashed by her hallucinogenic pollens and have no choice but to serve her against their will as either minion or dinner.

Roleplaying Exaxia

Exaxia is devoid of empathy or remorse. She thinks only of securing her domain and her next meal as she stalks the depths of the woods. Her voice is silky-sweet as she attempts to lull her potential prey into a false sense of security. While the *carrion heart seed** unthinkingly demands sustenance, some small part of what remains of Exaxia the necromancer enjoys toying with her victims before devouring them. If she has recently fed, those unfortunate enough to be caught in her trap might find their last moments drawn out just a touch longer, as Exaxia toys with them a while. However, there is no hope of mercy, for the ravenous hunger of the seed lies at her heart. The Thorn Witch's craving for flesh will eventually overpower any distraction.

Exaxia's Tactics

Exaxia seeks to avoid engaging in combat until she has the advantage. She never initiates battle until she ensures she is well-positioned and prepared. Her plantlike form makes her incredibly difficult to detect while motionless. She prefers to observe her targets for an extended period before striking. She waits for interlopers to let down their guard or make camp for the night before picking them off one by one.

If forced into combat before she has a chance to prepare, Exaxia will quickly deploy her hallucinogenic, aromatic pollen to draw her opponents to her, with the goal of trapping victims in her abdomen. She will employ every advantage at her disposal to break the enemy party's formation and disrupt their positioning. Entrapping her opponents is vital since her rigid bark-like skin and sprawling multi-legged form is stiff and unwieldy on the ground.

Exaxia's sense of self-preservation is inversely proportional to how long it has been since her last meal. Sometimes her hunger drives her to the brink of madness, causing her to abandon any idea of retreat as she attempts to feed at any cost. However, if well-fed, she may choose to retreat into the treetops to hide if she finds herself outnumbered and outmaneuvered.

Exaxia's Traits

Ideal. "My life was stolen from me, so I have the right to consume the life of others."

Bond. "The untouched deeps of the forest welcomed me with their darkness. In turn, I will protect it."

Flaw. "When the hunger is upon me, I will do anything to sate my crushing appetite."

Adventure Hooks

Consider using the following scenarios if you wish to pit your players against the Thorn Witch, Exaxia.

A Cure for Almayra. The leader of a local town, Lady Almayra, has fallen gravely ill. Perplexed by her condition and with all the usual remedies failing, her physicians have grown desperate enough to try unconventional methods. A call has been put out to adventurers brave enough to venture in the old wood. Anyone able to locate the silvery herb known as the *frond of the fallen* that grows in the fabled Thorn Witch's lair and return with it will be rewarded handsomely.

The Logging Camp. To meet the rising demand for lumber, especially with the construction of new siege weaponry, the local monarchy has ordered a new forestry camp set up to harvest the large old-growth trees deep in the woods. The scouting party charged with setting up an advance camp has gone silent. Three weeks have passed, and a new scouting party is being assembled to complete the mission and report back on the status of the first crew. Anyone brave enough to join their efforts will be given their pick of horses from the king's stables as well as a generous gold reward paid on their successful return.

A River Runs Through It. The creek running through a nearby village has dried up, plunging the villagers and nearby farmers into a panic. A quick investigation has uncovered the cause: a tangled growth of vines covered in glowing buds blocks the river upstream. The thorny mass seems to have sprouted up overnight, forming a natural dam. Rumors of a strange thorny beast stalking the woods nearby have rattled the locals, and no one has volunteered to clear the riverbed. The villagers have little to offer in the way of gold, but they can supply a fine cargo of trade goods to any adventurers willing to tackle the vines and restore the river.

The Rotting Kingdom

The powerful necrotic energy Exaxia exudes begins to transform the forest should she linger in one spot for long. The trees rot away, strangled by vines covered in buds that glow softly in the darkness. Whether they be interlopers or cleverly trapped prey, the Thorn Witch will employ the many natural hazards and traps in her domain to eliminate her foes.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Exaxia can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- Exaxia causes the thorny underbrush in a 20-foot radius around herself to become thicker and overgrown until the start of the next round. While this is in effect, the area becomes difficult terrain. Any creature that starts their turn in this area must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 5 (2d4) piercing damage as the thorns tear into their flesh.
- Exaxia emits a high-pitched shriek to activate the latent spores floating in the air throughout her lair's deep thickets. Any creature within 120 ft of Exaxia must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) poison damage on a failure. Once she has used this action, she must use one of her other lair actions before she can use it again.
- Corrupted vines come to Exaxia's aid and twist around her, giving her vitality. Their glowing buds burst briefly into riotous bloom before wilting away. Exaxia gains 13 (3d8) temporary hit points.

Carrion Heart Seed

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

This wretched seed resembles a large, rotten heart and is found growing amongst rot and decay in overgrown graveyards. Though prized as a component in necromantic rituals, the *carrion heart seed** is most powerful when bonded with a living creature.

While attuning to a *carrion heart seed**, the bearer must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 4d6 necrotic damage on a failed save and half as much on a success. Success or fail, the seed attaches itself to the bearer and becomes attuned. Removing the attached seed requires repeating this saving throw.

Once attuned, the bearer can cast the *acid splash* cantrip. Wisdom is your spellcasting ability for this spell.

The *carrion heart seed** has 5 charges for the following properties. The heart regains 1d4 + 1 expended charges daily at dawn.

Death Touch. When you hit with a melee attack, you can expend 1 charge to deal an extra 2d6 necrotic damage to the target.

Alluring Scent. You can use an action to expend 2 charges to create an intoxicating aura of aromatic perfume around you. For the next minute, each creature that starts its turn within 10 feet of you must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a target is charmed by your perfume. A charmed target must move up to its speed toward you on its turn. A charmed target may repeat the saving throw as an action on its turn, ending the effect on itself on a success. On a successful save, a target is immune to the alluring scent for 24 hours.

Frond of the Fallen

Wondrous item, rare

A large fern-like, silvery leaf divided into countless smaller leaves. When held aloft, it reflects light and appears metallic. The frond's base is a deep burgundy and can be sharpened to form a writing implement. If used for writing, the frond requires no ink, as the frond will naturally generate its own dark red writing fluid.

The frond has three small edible stalks. Consuming one stalk cures any disease afflicting the target immediately and removes the blinded, deafened, paralyzed, poisoned, and charmed conditions. After all three stalks have been consumed, only the inedible part of the frond remains, which can continue to be used for writing.

Thorn Witch's Stiletto

Weapon (dagger), rare (requires attunement)

A wicked, needle-thin, black blade that must be implanted in the bearer's arm to be wielded properly. When retracted, the blade becomes undetectable to the naked eye as it burrows into the user's flesh. The user must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw to tolerate the initial pain of embedding the stiletto into their forearm, or else the attunement fails.

Once attuned, the blade becomes inseparable from the user. If the bearer is subjected to an effect that would disarm them, this blade is unaffected. The blade can be extended or retracted using a bonus action. When extended, it can be wielded as a weapon while leaving the hand free to hold other objects.

This weapon counts as a dagger without the thrown property and deals an additional 2d6 necrotic damage against living creatures on a hit. Proficiency with daggers allows you to add your proficiency bonus to the attack roll for any attack you make with it.

Devotees of Exaxia

Individuals exposed to Exaxia's intoxicating pollen and spores for too long become addicted to the hallucinogenic effect, seeing her as a benevolent nature spirit. They devote themselves to her service and protection, and while she is not too hungry, it pleases Exaxia to accept their devotion. Some of them become grove tenders and busy themselves with the upkeep of her domain. Others are more concerned with helping sate their dark mistress's unending appetite. To this end, they will not only keep a careful watch for any potential threats from their covert treetop posts but also actively seek out and incapacitate any warm-blooded creatures they can in order to earn their lady's favor. They are doubly motivated as, if they cannot bring her sufficient sustenance, Exaxia will feast on them.

The **devotees of Exaxia** are skillful warriors. They are remarkably stealthy, and the presence of Exaxia's pollen in their bloodstream has made them incredibly resilient.

Devotee of Exaxia

Medium humanoid, chaotic evil

Armor Class	16 (scale mail)
Hit Points	45 (6d8 + 18)
Speed	40 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Acrobatics +5, Insight +3, Perception +3, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances poison

Senses darkvision 60ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Sylvan

Challenge 4 (1,950 XP)

The Thorn Witch's Chosen. The devotee has advantage on saving throws against being frightened or charmed and cannot be put to sleep by magical means.

Nutritious Treat. If trapped inside Exaxia's abdomen, the devotee will happily sacrifice themselves to her, making themselves easier to digest. When Exaxia uses her A Tasty Morsel ability, she regains 33 (6d10) hit points and deals twice as much acid damage to the captive.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The devotee deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll due to being hidden from their target. They cannot use this ability again until they successfully take the Hide action.

Actions

Multiattack. The devotee makes two Thorn Witch's Stiletto attacks.

Thorn Witch's Stiletto. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

Corrosive Vial. The devotee hurls a vial of swirling pink fermented liquid. This acidic concoction is distilled and concentrated with great care from Exaxia's sap into a more potent form. The devotee can aim at one or two creatures within 60 feet. If two targets are chosen, they must be within 5 feet of each other. Each target must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) acid damage on a failure or half as much damage on a success.

EXAXIA

THE THORN WITCH

Large plant, neutral evil

Armor Class	15 (natural armor)
Hit Points	161 (17d10 + 68)
Speed	25 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +4, Persuasion +5, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances necrotic, piercing, slashing

Damage Immunities poison

Damage Vulnerabilities fire, radiant

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, frightened

Senses blindsight 40ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Eight Legged Lady. Exaxia can climb trees and other difficult surfaces easily. She can hang upside down from trees and does not need to make difficulty checks to do so. She can also swing from tree to tree using her normal movement, provided that these trees are no more than 40 feet from each other.

Intoxicating Scent. Each creature that starts its turn within 15 feet of Exaxia must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by Exaxia's intoxicating perfume. Charmed targets must use all of their movement on their turn to get as close to Exaxia as possible. A victim of her perfume can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the Effect ends for it, the creature is immune to Exaxia's Intoxicating Scent for the next 24 hours.

Natural Camouflage. While motionless and in her natural habitat, Exaxia has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks to stay hidden.

Actions

Multiattack. Exaxia makes four attacks: two with her blighted touch and two with her vine lash. She can replace any of these attacks with splinter attacks.

Blighted Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (3d8) necrotic damage.

Vine Lash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d6 + 3) piercing damage and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 10 (3d6) poison damage and become grappled. On a successful saving throw, the target is not grappled and takes half as much poison damage. Exaxia cannot have more than two creatures grappled at one time.

Splinter. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) piercing damage. On a successful hit, the target is restrained until they or another creature uses an action to make a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check to remove the pinning splinter.

Legendary Actions

Exaxia can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Exaxia regains all spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Sticky and Sweet (Costs 2 Actions). Exaxia opens her flower-like abdomen and stuffs one creature she has grappled into her sticky maw. She swallows her prey entirely and does not release them until a successful DC 15 Strength check is made by another creature to free the captive. While inside her abdomen, creatures are restrained. Only one creature at a time can be trapped in this way.

A Tasty Morsel. Exaxia begins digesting a captive trapped within her abdomen. She regains 16 (3d10) hit points and deals half as much acid damage to the captive.

Indigestion. Exaxia coughs up a 10-foot radius acidic pool up to 25 feet. away from her. Creatures in the area must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 3 (1d6) acid damage. Creatures that start their turn in the pool take 7 (2d6) acid damage. The pool lasts for 2 rounds of combat before the natural acids oxidize and lose their potency.

FULMINI

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 022	**ALIAS:** The Vampirate Queen
SIZE: Medium	**TYPE:** Undead
DANGER LEVEL: 14	**DEMEANOR:** Bloodsucking & Swashbuckling

WARNING:

BLOOD IN THE WATER ATTRACTS WORSE THAN SHARKS

NOTES:

She's the Queen alright, feared and loved in equal measure. We've lost a couple of agents to her wiles, so be careful. A job on her ship is a lifetime appointment.

-Captain Balsom Stelt, Department of Nautical Nasties

Concept: Jessica Marcrum
Writing & Game Design: Jessica Marcrum
Original Cover: Sally Thordarson
Illustrations: Thabiso Mhlaba

THE SEA RUNS RED!

Fulmini, The Vampirate Queen

Feared throughout the high seas is a ship with blood-stained sails. Crewed by the dead and worse, the Siren's Wail is the terror of the high seas, and Captain **Fulmini** is its queen. Whenever sailors see the Siren's Wail approach, they dive into the sea, preferring death over becoming part of her dread crew. They then find themselves entangled in the many arms of **wereoctopus** sailors and dragged aboard. Once she sets her sights on a prize, Captain Fulmini never lets go.

Heart of the Sea. True captains are made, not born. Captain Fulmini was born Lianna Vayaire, a high elf of privilege. Just before her seventy-fifth birthday, she fell in love with a human woman, Annabeth Bonney, and swore she would find a way for her love to live as long as she could. Taking to sea, her travels brought her face to face with a vampire lord who provided a painful, though effective, solution. Calling Annabeth to her side, Lianna agreed to vampirism and began planning their eternal undead happiness.

Alas, tragedy struck. Annabeth's ship sank on that fateful journey and Lianna, now a vampire, was forever changed. Determined that death wouldn't stop her, she braved running water and commandeered the crew of a ship, converting them into her vampire spawn. Sailing out into the middle of the ocean, she screamed to the sea gods that she would not rest until her love was returned to her.

Striking a Bargain. The gods answered her call: lightning struck her at that very moment. Instead of killing her, Lianna became infused with the power and wrath of the sea itself. Sea beasts of all kinds swarmed the ship, including strange six-armed humanoids with the ability to change into giant octopuses.

With the power to command the very ocean, the search for her love's sunken ship began in earnest. She will not rest until she finds Annabeth's resting place, restores her to life, and turns her to eternal vampirism.

All bargains come with a price, even those made with gods, so Captain Fulmini is bound to the sea. Were she to leave without access to saltwater, she would dissolve into brine.

Service Beyond Life. Any ship boarded by Captain Fulmini is captured, looted, and their crew turned into either food or additional crewmates. She has an entire ocean to search, so the more **wereoctopuses** she can create, the better. Service on the *Siren's Wail* is for life, though that means significantly more to her **vampirate** crew members than the **wereoctopuses**.

A Beacon of Hope. Looting ships for treasure and sending her wereoctopuses on dives for wreckage has served Captain Fulmini well over the last century, but time is running short.

Her love has been dead for nearly 200 years. Past that point, there will be no saving Annabeth. Fortunately, on Lianna's latest endeavor, she found Gwynten, a traveling tempest **priest** carrying a *spell scroll* of *true resurrection* in order to raise a prophet. Charming him immediately,

she learned that even without magical charm, he revered her as an avatar of the storm and would follow her to the darkest fathoms. Now, with Gwynten by her side, Captain Fulmini can resurrect Annabeth as soon as they dredge up her corpse.

Roleplaying Fulmini

Captain Fulmini is accustomed to getting her way. She is brusque, cocky, and speaks with the confidence of her rank. She is hot-headed but not foolish. Equally deadly with a blade as with her wits, she prefers to charm persistent or powerful foes into her service rather than kill them. Waste not, want not, especially at sea.

If Captain Fulmini senses disagreement or dissension in the party, she is quick to act on it, turning one member against another. While she truly yearns for her lost love, she is not against playing it up to bring a sympathetic soul to her cause. Her driving emotion is anger, but it is always kept simmering just below the surface.

Fulmini's Tactics

Captain Fulmini roams the sea, seeking revenge on a world that took Annabeth from her. Even after she succeeds in finding and resurrecting her true love, she will not be satisfied until the world hurts as much as she has these past years. She raids ships ruthlessly and unsparingly, typically sending her sea creatures and sailors out to do the dirty work and then turning any survivors to her cause. If anyone dares face her on the deck of her own ship, she is more than prepared.

Captain Fulmini has the ocean itself working alongside her, with its inhabitants and the power of lightning at her command. While she prefers to send her sailors to fight on her behalf, she is not opposed to getting her hands wet when faced with a particularly interesting opponent, especially if she thinks they can be of use to her in some way.

Fulmini's Traits

Ideal. "My world was taken from me, so I aim to take down the world, one ship at a time."
Bond. "I vow to bring back my true love, stolen by the sea."
Flaw. "I've forgotten almost everything about my love, but I will never admit that to myself. The pain of losing her is all that keeps me going."

Memento of Annabeth

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Captain Fulmini in your campaign.

Abducted at Sea. While sailing between adventures, the party is attacked and boarded by Captain Fulmini and her crew. She is eager to take them on as part of the crew, but how eager are they to become a **vampirate** or a **wereoctopuses**?

Safe Passage. A local noble is exasperated by merchant ships being sunk and boarded by this mysterious "lightning pirate" with her "six-armed monsters." They offer high payment to anyone who can rid the seas of this menace and guarantee their ships safe travel again.

Saving Gwynten. The Sacred Order of Tidecasters puts out a call that one of their missionaries, Gwynten, has gone missing. Sent to resurrect a prophet across the sea, he hasn't made contact. They fear the worst and will pay greatly for his safe return.

A Floating Nightmare

The Siren's Wail is at home wherever it sails. A cold, restless mist emanates from it like blood-soaked sea spray. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Captain Fulmini can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects. She can't use the same lair action two rounds in a row.

- Ropes and rigging come to life at Captain Fulmini's call in a 20-foot square within 90 feet of her, creating an area of difficult terrain. A creature in the area must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or be restrained by the rigging. A creature can use its action to make a Strength (Athletics) check against the same DC to free itself or an ally.
- Mist around the *Siren's Wail* takes on nightmarish shapes of blood-drenched sea monsters, ghosts, and worse. Any enemy creatures within 120 feet of the *Siren's Wail* must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened. If a creature fails this saving throw by 5 or more, it also takes 10 (3d6) psychic damage.
- The water around the *Siren's Wail* becomes electrically charged. All enemy creatures within 120 feet of the *Siren's Wail* must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Regional Effects

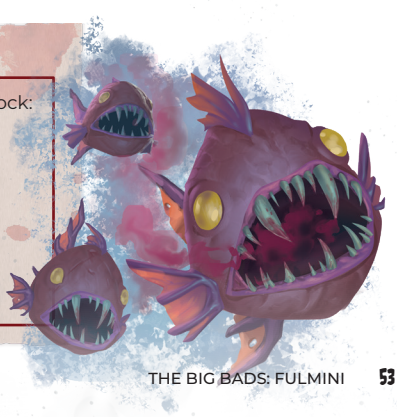
The waves sailed by the Siren's Wail are changed by its presence. Within a 5-mile radius of the Siren's Wail, the following effects can be observed:

- There's a noticeable increase in the population of **quippers**, **giant octopuses**, and **reef sharks** in the region.
- Aquatic creatures within 5 miles of the Siren's Wail that have an Intelligence score of 2 or lower are charmed by Captain Fulmini and are aggressive toward intruders in the area.
- A creeping fog clings to the water within 500 feet of the Siren's Wail. The fog takes eerie forms, such as circling sharks and kraken tentacles.

Gwynten

Gwynten is a **priest** with the following adjustments to his stat block:

- His Divine Eminence deals lightning damage.
- Gwynten has the following spells prepared:
  - ***Cantrips (at will):*** *light, shocking grasp, thaumaturgy*
  - ***1st level (4 slots):*** *cure wounds, inflict wounds, sanctuary*
  - ***2nd level (3 slots):*** *gust of wind, spiritual weapon*
  - ***3rd level (2 slots):*** *lightning bolt, water walk*



VAMPIRATE

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class	15 (natural armor)
Hit Points	82 (11d8 + 33)
Speed	30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Wis +3

Skills Acrobatics +6, Perception +3, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Lightfooted. The vampirate can take the Dash or Disengage action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Regeneration. The vampirate regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or on land. If the vampirate takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of the vampirate's next turn.

Spider Climb. The vampirate can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Vampirate Weaknesses. The vampirate has the following weaknesses:

- **Stake to the Heart.** The vampirate is destroyed if a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into its heart while it is incapacitated in its resting place.
- **Sunlight Hypersensitivity.** The vampirate takes 20 radiant damage when it starts its turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Actions

Multiattack. The vampirate makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by the vampirate or its allies, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and the vampirate regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point
maximum to 0.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage. Instead of dealing damage, the vampirate can grapple the target on a successful hit (escape DC 13).

Net. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 5/15 ft., one Large or smaller creature. *Hit:* The target is restrained. A creature can use its action to make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check to free itself or another creature in a net, ending the effect on a success. Dealing 5 slashing damage to the net (AC 10) frees the target without harming it and destroys the net.

Reactions

Parry. The vampirate adds 3 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the vampirate must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Wereoctopus

Medium humanoid (shapechanger), neutral evil

Armor Class	12 (humanoid form) 13 (hybrid and octopus form)
Hit Points	71 (11d8 + 22)
Speed	30 ft., swim 40 ft. (humanoid and hybrid form); 15 ft., swim 60 ft. (octopus form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +3, Stealth +4

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with silvered weapons

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Aquan, Common

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Hold Breath. The wereoctopus can hold its breath for 1 hour.

Shapechanger. The wereoctopus can use its action to polymorph into a Large octopus-humanoid hybrid or into a Large giant octopus or back into its true form, which is humanoid. Its statistics, other than its size, AC, and speed, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Underwater Camouflage (Octopus Form Only). The wereoctopus has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made while underwater.

Water Breathing (Octopus Form Only). While in octopus form, the wereoctopus can breathe only underwater.

Actions

Multiattack. The wereoctopus makes six melee attacks.

Beak (Octopus or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target grappled by the wereoctopus. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is a humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with wereoctopus lycanthropy.

Scimitar (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Tentacles (Octopus or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the wereoctopus can't use its tentacles on another target.

Ink Cloud (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). A 20-foot-radius cloud of ink extends all around the wereoctopus if it is underwater. The area is heavily obscured for 1 minute, although a significant current can disperse the ink. After releasing the ink, the wereoctopus can use the Dash action as a bonus action.

FULMINI

THE VAMPIRATE QUEEN

Medium undead (shapechanger), chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather armor)
Hit Points 144 (17d8 + 68)
Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	18 (+4)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +8, Cha +9

Skills Acrobatics +9, Athletics +9, Perception +8, Persuasion +9, Stealth +9

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities lightning

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages Aquan, Common, Deep Speech, Elvish

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Electric Bloodline. Whenever Fulmini is subjected to lightning damage, she takes no damage and regains a number of hit points equal to the lightning damage dealt.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Fulmini fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Lightfooted. Fulmini can take the Dash or Disengage action as a bonus action on each of her turns.

Misty Escape. When she drops to 0 hit points outside her cabin, Fulmini transforms into a cloud of mist (as in the Shapechanger trait) instead of falling unconscious, provided that she isn't in sunlight or on land. If she can't transform, she is destroyed.

While she has 0 hit points in mist form, she can't revert to her vampire form and must reach her cabin within 2 hours or be destroyed. Once in her cabin, she reverts to her vampire form. She is then paralyzed until she regains at least 1 hit point. After spending 1 hour in her resting place with 0 hit points, she regains 1 hit point.

Regeneration. Fulmini regains 20 hit points at the start of her turn if she has at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or on land. If she takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of her next turn.

Shapechanger. If Fulmini isn't in sunlight or on land, she can use her action to polymorph into a Tiny petrel (use **owl** stats), Small **octopus**, or Medium cloud of mist, or back into her true form. While in petrel form, Fulmini can't speak, her walking speed is 5 feet, and she has a flying speed of 60 feet. While in octopus form, Fulmini can't speak, her walking speed is 5 feet, and she has a swimming speed of 30 feet. She reverts to her true form if she dies. Her statistics, other than her size and speed, are unchanged. Anything she is wearing transforms with her, but nothing she is carrying does.

While in mist form, Fulmini can't take any actions, speak, or manipulate objects. She is weightless, has a flying speed of 20 feet, can hover, and can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. In addition, if air can pass through a space, the mist can do so without squeezing, and she can't pass through water. She has advantage on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws, and she is immune to all nonmagical damage, except the damage she takes from sunlight.

Spider Climb. Fulmini can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Vampirate Weaknesses. Fulmini has the following weaknesses:

- **Sea Stuck.** Fulmini cannot be away from saltwater for more than 8 hours. Each hour she spends away from saltwater following that causes her maximum hit points to reduce by 10 and she becomes vulnerable to fire damage. This effect ends when she is immersed in saltwater.
- **Stake to the Heart.** If a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into her heart while she is incapacitated in her cabin, she is paralyzed until the stake is removed.
- **Sunlight Hypersensitivity.** While in sunlight, Fulmini takes 20 radiant damage at the start of her turn, and she has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Actions

Multiattack (Vampire Form Only). Fulmini makes three attacks, only one of which can be a Bite attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by Fulmini or one of her allies, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and Fulmini regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. A humanoid slain in this way and then buried at sea rises the following night as a **vampirate** under Fulmini's control.

Rapier (Vampire Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage. Instead of dealing damage, Fulmini can grapple the target on a successful hit (escape DC 18).

Charm. Fulmini targets one humanoid she can see within 30 feet of her. If the target can see her, the target must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed. The charmed target regards Fulmini as a trusted friend to be heeded and protected. The target isn't under Fulmini's control, but it takes her requests and actions in the most favorable way and lets her bite it.

Each time Fulmini or her companions do anything harmful to the target, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success. Otherwise, the effect lasts 24 hours or until Fulmini is destroyed, is on a different plane of existence than the target, or takes a bonus action to end the effect.

Children of the Night (1/Day). Fulmini magically calls 2d4 swarms of petrels (use **swarm of ravens** stats) or **swarms of quippers**, provided that the sun isn't up. While at sea, she can call 1d4 **giant octopuses** and 2d6 **reef sharks** instead. The called creatures arrive in 1d4 rounds, acting as allies of Fulmini and obeying her spoken commands. The beasts remain for 1 hour, until Fulmini dies, or until she dismisses them as a bonus action.

Legendary actions

Fulmini can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Fulmini regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Hoist the Colors. Fulmini rallies her crew, encouraging them to fight harder. 1d4 crew members that can see or hear Fulmini roll an additional d10 on one attack roll or saving throw of their choice (this effect ends after 1 minute). A crewmember can only have one die from Fulmini at a time.

Bite (Costs 2 Actions). Fulmini makes one bite attack.

Hurricane A'Comin (Costs 3 Actions). Fulmini calls down a thunderstorm with herself at the center. Everyone within a 30-foot radius of Fulmini must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take 16 (3d10) lightning damage, while Fulmini takes no damage and regains a number of hit points equal to the damage rolled.

GOLLYTHANK

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 005	ALIAS: The Disgruntled Toymaker
SIZE: Small	TYPE: Humanoid
DANGER LEVEL: 1 to 6	DEMEANOR: Not Very Jolly

WARNING:

BEWARE TICKING GIFTS

NOTES:

This guy's cocoa has turned bitter, I'm afraid. Deadly dolls and perilous playthings? Hardly merry-making.

-Agent Biska Twinkle, Department of Festive Foes

Concept: Christopher Pinch
Writing & Game Design: Christopher Pinch
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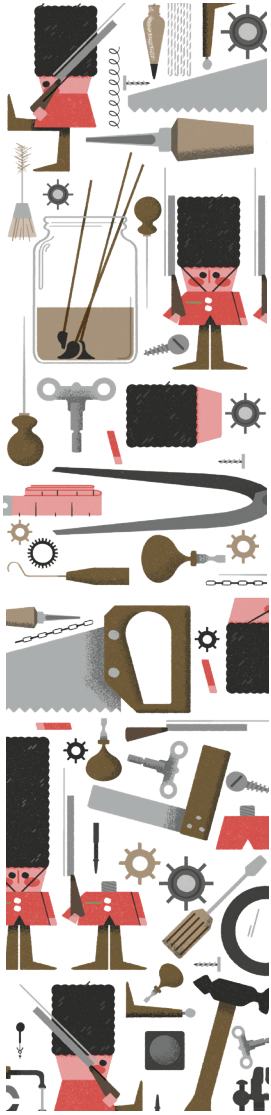


BETTER WATCH OUT!

Gollythank, The Disgruntled Toymaker

Gollythank Gemmerous is a talented artificer who comes from a long line of gnomish toymakers. Once, they were a famous and prosperous family, and everyone in Gollythank's home village knew the Gemmerous slogan: *"A Gemmerous toy makes a generous gift!"* Gollythank took over as village toymaker after his parents retired, though their toyshop had long since passed its heyday. Even still, Gollythank felt a great deal of satisfaction bringing a smile to the faces of children who loved his clockwork toys, and he worked hard to retain the few customers who visited his shop.

Gollythank dreams of reclaiming his family's former renown with innovative toy designs, which he hopes will come to define the toymaking world for years to come.

Chance of a Lifetime. One fateful day, Gollythank was approached by a jolly hermit wizard known throughout the realm as the Scarlet Sage of the Solstice—a quasi-mythical entity who brings toys to good children every year on the eve of the Winter Solstice. While watching the good children of the world with his divination magic, the Sage saw the talent and skill Gollythank possessed, not only as a toymaker but as someone who cared about making children smile. It was because of this that the Sage offered the gnome a chance to become his master toymaker. Gollythank was skeptical at first, but after seeing the workshop he would be in charge of, he was all too happy to accept the Sage's offer.

Working for the Man Every Night and Day. Gollythank served the Scarlet Sage loyally for the next one hundred years, working on designs he considered "boring," all the while devoting countless hours, in secret, toward his innovative masterworks. Each year, Gollythank introduced a new idea for a revolutionary toy design: a clockwork doll that needed to be fed regularly to avoid its simulated death, an army of toy soldiers with live ammunition for a true wartime simulation, a clockwork dragon capable of breathing real fire. Although each toy gave an impressive performance, these designs were declined by the Sage as being potentially dangerous, despite Gollythank's assurances to the contrary. Each rejection took its toll on Gollythank, but he continued to serve the Sage faithfully in hopes of one day gaining recognition for his unique and bold designs. However, after seeing his toys rejected again and again, Gollythank could no longer contain his resentment for the Sage, and he snapped. He cut ties with his former employer, determined to prove the value of his innovations and restore the luster of the Gemmerous family name.

Roleplaying Gollythank

Whip-smart and canny, Gollythank sees himself as both a craftsman and an artist, and he is deeply protective of his work. He is eccentric and unappreciative of "common-sense" approaches to design, which

he derides as lacking the courage required to truly be innovative. Gollythank has combined mechanical gnomish clockwork with arcane magic to create remarkable inventions that move, react, and think in ways normal toys cannot. Gollythank scoffs that none of the toys he made for the Sage are representative of his true potential, each one being a fairly typical iteration of an existing design.

Despite his pride and stubbornness, Gollythank is a good person at heart. Though not always kind or pleasant, he abhors evil, and even at his most self-serving he doesn't wish to harm others. This is especially true of children, whom Gollythank still wishes to delight and surprise with his toys.

Unfortunately, Gollythank has had a century to nurse his resentment against the Scarlet Sage, and he won't be satisfied until he feels he's had a chance to prove the merit of his work. Gollythank knows his creations can be dangerous and has even employed a few in his defense, but he's fooled himself into believing that they are only harmful if he wills them to be. Gollythank programmed magical safety protocols into his toys to prevent them from hurting people, though in reality these protocols are faulty and the toys are still dangerous.

What's more, after cutting ties with the Scarlet Sage, Gollythank has become increasingly paranoid. He is suspicious of anyone who comes looking for him, as he is certain the Sage will send someone to try and stop him from distributing his revolutionary new toys. Gollythank is difficult to reason with despite his intellect. At present, his personal feelings about his designs have made it impossible for him to discuss them rationally. According to Gollythank, his toys may roughhouse with children from time to time, but they present no real danger thanks to his "impervious" safety protocols. Nothing short of firsthand evidence will persuade him otherwise.

Gollythank's Tactics

Above all else, Gollythank is an inventor and remains focused on his work. His singular aim is to stay hidden so he can continue inventing away from the prying eyes of the Scarlet Sage. Until he is alerted of intruders to his workshop, he will be hard at work creating what he believes to be the next big thing. Gollythank has created a suit of mechanical armor powered by arcane magic, called the Holly Jolly Apparatus, which he will use to defend himself against anyone the Sage might send to try and thwart his plans. Gollythank's quick thinking and paranoid nature means he is likely to shoot first and ask questions later.

Gollythank is crafty and tactical in battle, preferring hit-and-run tactics which keep him from being pinned down. He also believes in strength in numbers, and will deploy his creations to help even the playing field. Rather than hiding behind his minions, he uses them to create opportunities he can exploit in combat. Though tactically minded, Gollythank isn't one to take a calm and cautious approach. He will try out new options in combat, often on a whim, and will stake everything on a big gamble or risky strategy if he feels cornered.

Though Gollythank won't shy away from fighting, he doesn't want to hurt people. If winning a fight, he will attempt to persuade the party to leave him alone, and warn them that they may face deadly consequences should they continue. Though the party will find it difficult to convince Gollythank of his toy's flaws, they may have an easier time convincing him of their own good intentions. Any party that agrees to his conditions, laying down their arms and agreeing to be manacled, can try to negotiate with him.

A Terrible Toy

Gollythank's Traits

Ideal. "My name will live on in my memorable creations, synonymous with new, exciting, and revolutionary toy designs!"

Bond. "As inventors, it's our duty to push beyond the known and into the experimental. Innovation is how we improve!"

Flaw. "My designs are perfect, I tell you. PERFECT! They're foolproof!"

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Gollythank Gemmerous in your campaign:

A Nightmare Upon Solstice. It's Solstice morning when the party receives word from none other than the Scarlet Sage of the Solstice himself! The good wizard will inform them that his master toymaker lost his mind, and released dangerous, untested toys upon an unsuspecting town. It's up to the party to find Gollythank's workshop to obtain a master control switch they can use to turn off all his toys at once.

Cabin Containment Breach. The party is awoken one night by a creepy toy that has found its way into their inn room. They aren't the only ones; several villagers in this small town have found their children playing with toys that they don't remember buying. Due to their flawed programming these toys behave as though they are normal and nonmagical, only to act oddly or maliciously when alone with one person. Once a toy's true nature is discovered, it will attempt to flee back to a mysterious cabin, hidden a half-day's walk outside town. This is Gollythank's portable workshop. Gollythank has been so occupied on his work that he is completely unaware these toys had escaped.

Little Holiday Shop of Horrors. Local villagers marvel at the demonstrations of an eccentric gnome toymaker who appears to have set up shop seemingly overnight in their quiet little town. Demonstrations of his life-like toys have wowed the townsfolk, and almost everyone has bought one for their children to open on Solstice day. A single traveling adventurer warns the party that the gnome's toys are dangerous, though a severely bashed up toy dragon is all he can offer as proof. He urges the party to investigate Gollythank's shop and expose him, before anyone is hurt.

Innovation Station

Gollythank's lair is a magical workshop that can be compressed into a pocket-sized cube for easy transport by speaking a command word. When fully deployed, the workshop is a spacious wooden cabin, comprising an 80-foot square area filled with shelves of supplies, strange clockwork devices, and racks of toys in various stages of completion. The workshop has a permanent *alarm* effect within 60 feet of it. This creates a silent mental ping that alerts Gollythank to potential intruders. His workshop is also masked by a *nondetection* effect.

Lair Actions

When fighting inside his workshop, Gollythank can control its magic to take lair actions via a specialized wristband. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Gollythank takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- Gollythank summons 1d4 **itty-bitty infantries**, two **teddy squeezums**, or one **clockwork dragon** to his defense. Any summoned creature has its security protocols overridden as it defends Gollythank to the best of its ability and lasts until destroyed. Gollythank can't use this lair action again until he has used a different lair action.
- Gollythank activates an experimental device that lowers from the ceiling and moves along the rafters via magical cogwork. The device can fire a 30-foot cone of flickering red and green light from a point within 30 feet of Gollythank. Any living creatures caught inside the cone must

succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be shrunk down and transformed into gingerbread versions of themselves until initiative count 20 on the next round. This effect otherwise functions as the reduce effect of an *enlarge/reduce* spell.

- Gollythank summons five **tinker bots** to repair the damage on his Holly Jolly Apparatus or summoned toys. The tinker bots remain until initiative count 20 on the next round, when they teleport away. Once a tinker bot is destroyed, the number of tinker bots Gollythank can summon with this lair action is reduced by one. When all five tinker bots have been destroyed, this lair action can't be used until Gollythank spends at least 12 hours to construct more. This requires Gollythank to have access to materials as well as his lair (or another suitable workshop).

The region around Gollythank's portable workshop shows clear signs of his presence, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- Within 1 mile of Gollythank's workshop, mechanical, holiday-themed traps hidden in the snow wait to ensnare intruders. Pit traps with candy cane spikes and tripwire-activated Rolling Sphere traps which deploy giant sleigh bells are common examples.
- A preponderance of gaudy holiday decorations have been haphazardly applied to trees and houses within 3 miles of Gollythank's workshop by his toy minions.
- Within 1 mile of the workshop, the party may run into 1d4 **itty-bitty infantries**, two **teddy squeezums**, or one **clockwork dragon**. Whatever creature they run into will be patrolling the area, on the lookout for intruders.

Gollythank's Toys

Gollythank's minions are highly sophisticated clockwork toys infused with magic that powers them and grants them limited sentience. These toys will follow any instructions given by their owner, but they generally behave in ways that are disturbing or dangerous.

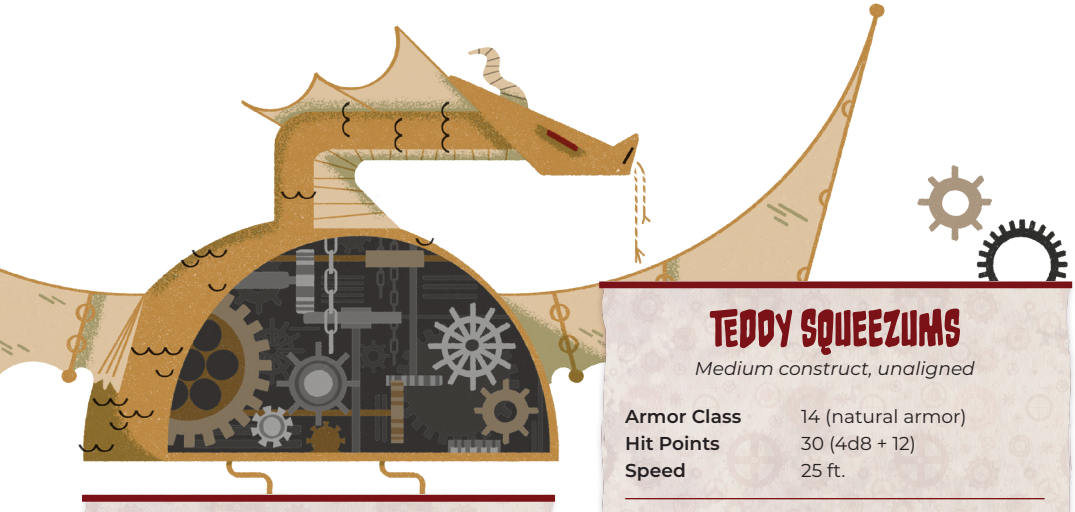
Safety Protocols. Gollythank's toys are programmed to pull their punches, and any creature reduced to 0 hit points by one of the toys' weapon attacks will remain stable. A toy can't be made to use any special damage-dealing actions (such as breath weapons) against creatures or objects it is aware of. The safety protocols can be overridden by Gollythank, in which case they will deal lethal damage with their attacks and have full use of their special actions.

Tinker Bots. These small pyramidal machines were made by Gollythank to assist him in more complicated or dangerous tinkering tasks. They are designed to be resilient and obedient, and they are equipped with a set of small robotic arms tipped with various tools. In a pinch, they can be summoned to repair his creations.

Clockwork Crossbow

Weapon (light crossbow), rare

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. A clockwork mechanism allows you to simply feed bolts into the crossbow rather than reload, so it does not have the loading property. Additionally, it weighs half as much as a typical crossbow of its kind and requires only one hand to use.



Clockwork Dragon

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class	17 (natural armor)
Hit Points	60 (8d8 + 24)
Speed	30 ft., fly 60 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	5 (−3)	5 (−3)	5 (−3)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +5

Skills Perception +1, Stealth +4

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages understands Common but can't speak

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Ruinous. The clockwork dragon does not register damage it deals to property, and will go out of its way to destroy objects with its attacks or special actions when not in combat.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) piercing damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The clockwork dragon exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Teddy Squeezums

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class	14 (natural armor)
Hit Points	30 (4d8 + 12)
Speed	25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	5 (−3)	5 (−3)	14 (+2)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 7

Languages Common

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

But I Love You. The teddy bear can spend a bonus action pleading to a creature within 30 feet of it. Until the teddy bear's next turn, if that creature targets the teddy bear with an attack or a harmful spell, it must first make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature must choose a new target or lose the attack or spell. This spell doesn't protect the teddy bear from area effects, such as the explosion of a *fireball*.

Needy. The teddy bear requires constant affection in the form of hugs and snuggles. If denied such affection by its owner, it will seek it elsewhere and may become angry or sullen if it feels ignored.

Actions

Multiattack. The teddy bear makes two attacks: one with its Hug and one with its Snuggle.

Hug. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 13).

Snuggle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one grappled target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Tinker Bot

Tiny construct, unaligned

Armor Class	16 (natural armor)
Hit Points	13 (3d4 + 6)
Speed	20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (−4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	5 (−3)	10 (+0)	2 (−4)

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages understands Common but can't speak

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Spider Climb. The tinker bot can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Actions

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage.

Repair. The tinker bot restores 4 (1d8) hit points to another construct or object within 5 feet of it.

Return. The tinker bot teleports to Gollythank or back to its extradimensional storage area.

Itty-Bitty Infantry

Medium swarm of Tiny constructs, unaligned

Armor Class	11
Hit Points	22 (5d8)
Speed	30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (−1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	5 (−3)	5 (−3)	5 (−3)

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, stunned

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Senses passive Perception 7

Languages understands Common but can't speak

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Loud. The infantry marches loudly in formation and is compelled to demonstrate its firepower in jarring bursts of musket fire.

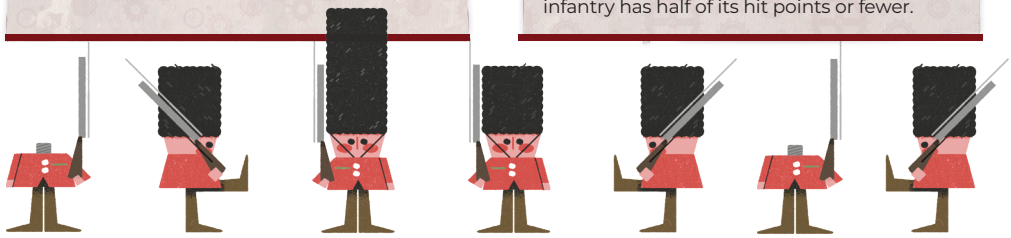
Swarm. The infantry can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the infantry can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny toy soldier. The infantry can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Toy Tactics. When the infantry attacks a creature with another infantry currently occupying its space or within 5 feet of another infantry, the infantry makes its attacks with advantage.

Actions

Bayonets. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the infantry's space. *Hit:* 5 (2d4) piercing damage, or 2 (1d4) piercing damage if the infantry has half of its hit points or fewer.

Muskets. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 10/30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) piercing damage, or 3 (1d6) piercing damage if the infantry has half of its hit points or fewer.



GOLLYTHANK GEMMEROUS

AND HIS HOLLY JOLLY APPARATUS

Large vehicle (Small humanoid (gnome) pilot), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 18 (Holly Jolly Apparatus)
Hit Points 162 (19d10 + 57)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	9 (−1)

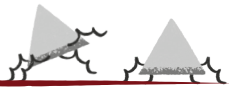
Saving Throws Int +8, Wis +5

Skills Arcana +11, History +11

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Gnomish

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)



Holly Jolly Apparatus. Gollythank pilots an apparatus of his own invention. The apparatus is a Large object which only Gollythank can use. While piloting the apparatus as a vehicle, Gollythank is protected from harm and can't be damaged until the apparatus is destroyed, though he can still be targeted by spells or abilities which do not deal damage. The hit points, Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution scores listed in this stat block belong to the apparatus.

Antimagic Susceptibility. Gollythank's Holly Jolly Apparatus is vulnerable to *dispel magic* or similar effects. If targeted by *dispel magic*, the apparatus makes a Constitution saving throw against the caster's spell save DC. If successfully dispelled, Gollythank can't take any Apparatus Actions or Piloting Maneuvers until the end of his next turn, as the magical mechanisms that power it are temporarily disrupted. The apparatus can't function inside of an antimagic field.

Piloting Maneuver. Gollythank can use his bonus action to take one of the following actions:

Booster Jets (3/Day). The apparatus gains a flying speed of 40 feet (hover) until the start of Gollythank's next turn.

Full Throttle. The apparatus takes the Dash action.

Reverse Thrusters. The apparatus takes the Disengage action.

Actions

Multiattack. Gollythank makes one attack with his clockwork crossbow and uses one Apparatus Action.

Clockwork Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Apparatus Action. When piloting the Holly Jolly Apparatus, Gollythank can use an action to do one of the following:

Double Lariat. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., each target in range. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage. Each target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked 15 feet away from Gollythank.

Festive Punch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Rocket Fist (2/Day). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 30/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be restrained. A restrained creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn to end the effect. Once both uses of this attack have been expended, Gollythank can't use Festive Punch until the next dawn.

Yuletide Blitz (Recharge 5–6). Gollythank fires a volley of red and green missiles which explode like solstice crackers in a 30-foot cone. Each creature within this cone must attempt a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 35 (10d6) fire damage on a failed saving throw or half as much damage on a successful one.

Legendary Actions

Gollythank can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Gollythank can take only one legendary action option at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Gollythank regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Apparatus Action. Gollythank takes an Apparatus Action.

Rapid Fire. Gollythank makes a Clockwork Crossbow attack.

Piloting Maneuver. Gollythank uses a Piloting Maneuver.

Use the following stat block if Gollythank isn't in his apparatus:

Gollythank Gemmerous

DISGRUNTLED TOYMAKER

Small humanoid (gnome), chaotic neutral

Armor Class	16 (*+2 hide armor*)
Hit Points	40 (9d6 + 9)
Speed	25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (−1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	9 (−1)

Saving Throws Int +7, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +7, History +7

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Gnomish

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Special Equipment. Gollythank wears *+2 hide armor* and *eyes of minute seeing* and wields a *clockwork crossbow**.

Actions

Call Apparatus. Gollythank can cause his Holly Jolly Apparatus to teleport to within 5 feet of him as long as both he and the apparatus are on the same plane of existence. He can mount the Holly Jolly Apparatus using half his movement speed.

Clockwork Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

GYX

BIG BAD BUREAU CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 016	ALIAS: Ossuary Architect
SIZE: Huge	TYPE: Beast
DANGER LEVEL: 9	DEMEANOR: Possessive & Obsessive

WARNING:

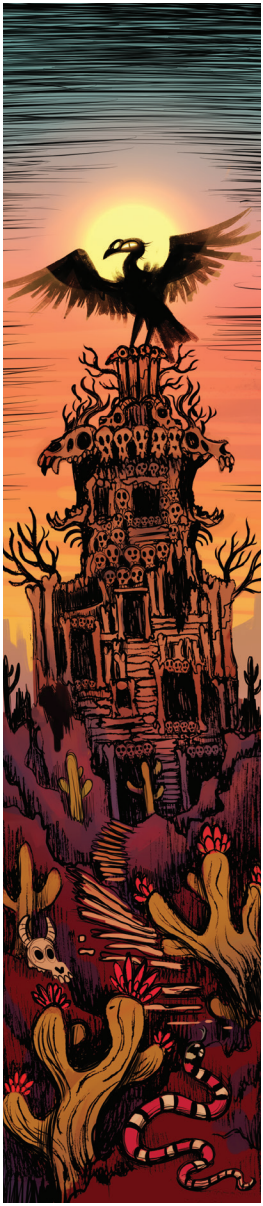
KEEP YOUR BONES INSIDE YOUR BODY AT ALL TIMES

NOTES:

I've never seen a better reason to avoid fame and fortune. Bureau agents don't end up in a big bird's bone museum. Heroes do.

-Agent Pippi Flock, Department of Avian Adversaries

Concept: Bailey Wright
Writing & Game Design: Bailey Wright
Original Cover: Dominique S. Ramsey
Illustrations: Holly Lucero



HE HAS A BONE TO PICK!

He sits atop his bower,
a castle of bone and glory—

A testament to his scavenging,
a tale both long and gory.

A tale of poets who sang their songs
and who ever more shall rest

Amongst the heroes brave
and grand who decorate this nest.

Their deeds of note he cruelly wrote
in patterns of lacy bone.

Behold! The Architect—
he comes to make this my final...

Last poem of the famed Syryl Songsinger

Gyx, Ossuary Architect

Gyx is an ossurok—a giant vulture closely related to the legendary roc. However, unlike their larger cousins, ossuroks rarely hunt live prey. Instead, they rely on their keen sense of sight and smell to seek out the fresh kills of other animals. In order to impress potential mates, male ossuroks gather the bones from their meals and pile them up to form a large, messy nest commonly referred to as an ossuary. The volume and variety of bones in these nests signal the builder's scavenging prowess, leading females to consistently choose males with the largest collections. Driven to create the biggest and most ornate ossuary of them all, Gyx has poured every fiber of his being into his obsession with collecting the remains of both heroes and villains alike. Whether their names are spoken of with reverence or disdain, should their deeds be grand enough, Gyx stops at nothing to add them to his ever-growing collection.

A Humble Beginning. Although Gyx's ossuary contains the bones of grand poets, tyrannical dragons, and fierce warriors, it wasn't always that way. When he was young, he would circle the battlefields with the other ossuroks. Once the bloodshed had concluded, he'd descend upon the fallen warriors with indiscriminate hunger.

Everything changed the day he witnessed the rise and fall of Magnar the Wolfblooded.

Perched atop a crumbling battlement, Gyx watched the battle intently as the other ossuroks jostled around him impatiently. While many complained about how hungry they were, Gyx sat enraptured by a lone warrior tearing his way through the enemy flanks. Eventually, the warrior's luck failed him and he was felled by a bolt of lightning thrown by a young wizard. Combatants and allies alike drank to

Magnar's battle prowess that night. Gyx couldn't get the image of the barbarian's rampage and the subsequent celebrations out of his head. The ossurok was overcome with the desire to obtain a memento of the man. In the dark of the night, Gyx flew over the battlefield; his keen nose detected his quarry. A single toe bone and scrap of singed cloth was all that remained of Magnar the Wolfblooded. Eagerly, Gyx scooped them up in his wickedly curved beak, the thrill of the find blooming like an ember in his chest. It was from that moment on that Gyx knew he needed more.

A Paranoid Collector. Gyx has poured his entire life into collecting the bones of famous individuals and constructing his ossuary. Because of this, he has become increasingly paranoid that thieves will destroy his life's work. In order to protect his collection, Gyx has built deadly pitfalls riddled with sharpened bones—the remains of lesser individuals—into the path leading to the ossuary's summit. If adventurers or townsfolk manage to avoid falling into these hidden traps, Gyx often tries to persuade or bully them into obtaining specimens for him so he can spend more time guarding his collection.

A Fanatic Following. There exists a small group of bards, poets, and artisans who believe that the pinnacle of success is to be buried among the other celebrated individuals in Gyx's Grand Ossuary. They strive to attain such notoriety in their respective fields so that it is impossible for Gyx to dismiss them. Occasionally, they make the pilgrimage to Gyx's territory and attempt to drum up prestige in the hopes that the ossurok will select them for a place of honor in his collection.

Failed Alliances. Occasionally, uneasy truces between ossuroks and the inhabitants of nearby villages are formed in which the remains of blighted livestock are offered up to the birds. In return, the ossurok protects the village from further infection by seeking out and devouring sick animals and refraining from disturbing the village's buried dead. Gyx has agreed to several of these truces during the two hundred years he has been building his collection. However, the temptation to acquire new pieces has proved too great over the years, and he has failed to uphold the ban on grave-robbing multiple times.

Roleplaying Gyx

Gyx is obsessed with his ossuary and does anything to obtain the perfect specimen. He is wiley and clever, but he has also become paranoid that thieves will strike his ossuary. He does not seem interested in a mate and chases females away to prevent them from stealing or disrupting his collection. His sole purpose in life is to perfect his ossuary.

If given the chance, Gyx regales listeners with tales of how he came upon a particular bone and the past deeds of its late owner. Flattery works well on Gyx, at least until he begins to suspect that someone is trying to distract or lull him into a false sense of security while they make plans to steal his most treasured possessions.

On the other hand, Gyx becomes offended when people fail to recognize the brilliance of his work and the notoriety of his collection. First he blames them for being ignorant and not knowing "the greats of generations past," then he moves on to assuming that they are also insulting the mastery of his construction.

While most ossuroks prefer to dine on scavenged flesh, Gyx makes an exception when it comes to individuals of renown. He seizes the opportunity to add a new skeleton to his ossuary by attacking an acclaimed—live—creature, unless he can be convinced that there will be even greater deeds to come if he lets his prey go. However, should he believe that this may be the only opportunity to obtain someone's remains or that his quarry may be particularly long lived, he may decide that the creature's current fame is enough to justify immediate devouring.

Gyx's Screech

Gyx spends much of his time researching and plotting how to obtain his next specimen. Often, he hangs around battlefields keenly observing the combatants in the hopes that one will display the kind of undeniable prowess that will inevitably find its way into songs. After the carnage, he picks through the remains and feasts on any that caught his eye, saving the bones and any identifying items to carry home to his ossuary. Occasionally, he comes across traveling minstrels or bards and listens to their stories in order to choose his next target.

Gyx's Tactics

Gyx can be lured away from his ossuary with the promise of a particularly prestigious specimen, such as a famous bard, king, or dragon. When assailants enter combat near his ossuary, he first tries to lure them over the sheer cliff face or into pitfall traps crafted out of the sharpened bones. If this tactic fails, he attempts to lure creatures away from the more impressive specimens in the center of the ossuary in order to avoid damaging them with his acidic stomach contents or knocking them out of place. If he does damage an important piece, he is thrown into a panicked rage and attacks wildly with his beak, talons, and corrosive stomach acid.

If encountered away from his ossuary, Gyx is anxious to flee, as he believes every moment away is an opportunity for someone to steal from his precious hoard. If cornered or trapped, he instinctively spews stomach acid on the closest enemies in range and throws himself at them in a mad attempt to get past them, lashing out with his talons.

Gyx's Traits

Ideal. "Collecting the bones of famous individuals makes me noteworthy as well."
Bond. "I will not rest until I have completed my glorious ossuary."
Flaw. "My obsession has taken over every aspect of my life."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Gyx in your campaign:

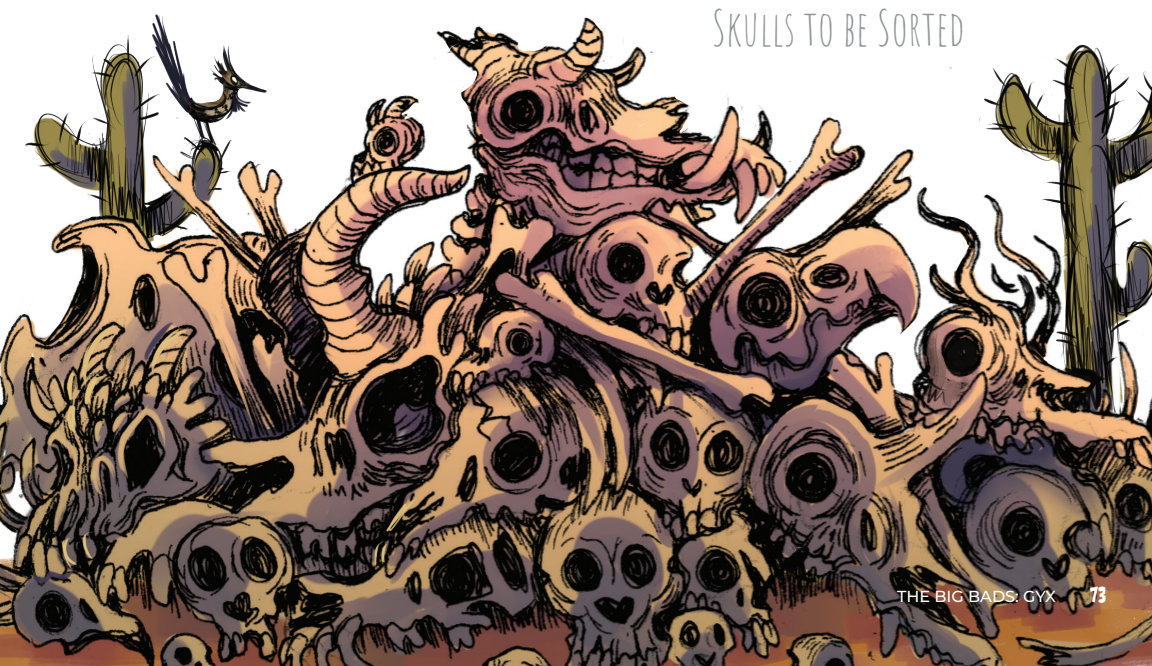
A Funeral Ruined. A local lord has died, and the funeral procession is winding its way toward his final resting place. Before anyone understands what is happening, a massive taloned foot reaches down, plucks the man's body from the hands of the mourners, and carries it away. The lord's daughter begs you to retrieve her father's body from Gyx's ossuary so that she can complete the burial rites and lay her father to rest.

Adding to the Collection. As he amasses more and more bones, Gyx becomes increasingly reluctant to leave his ossuary for fear of it being raided. Lately, he has been pining over the bones of two legendary dragon slayers. After perishing in battle while defending the land from a pair of blue dragons, their charred skulls were placed in a reliquary deep in the heart of a nearby abbey. Desperate to add these specimens to his growing collection yet hesitant to leave it unattended, Gyx enlists the characters to retrieve them for him.

The Mage's Relic. Over a century ago the last member of a legendary order of mages died, taking one of their sacred artifacts with her to the grave. Now, an aspiring young treasure hunter seeks to collect all seven of the order's magical relics, claiming an interest in re-forming the order. After spending years researching the mage's fate, the treasure hunter has finally located the mage's grave, only to find that both her bones and the artifact have been plundered. She asks the players to assist her in retrieving the stolen artifact.

Gyx's Grand Ossuary

After a century of careful curation, Gyx's ossuary puts many temples to shame. From a distance, it resembles an elaborate ivory fortress complete with spires and flying buttresses perched atop a lonely cliff. On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that the entire structure comprises carefully placed bones. Worked into the structure are winding patterns of skulls and vertebrae that accent the spire like lace on a fine dress. Hidden among the bone trusses are magical artifacts that once belonged to renowned creatures from far and near. With so many enchanted items all in one place, the air has become thick with a palpable magic that even the least gifted can sense.



Lair Actions

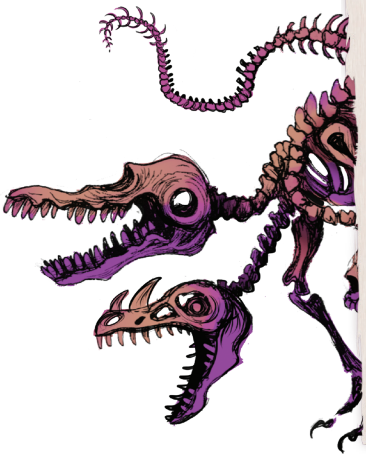
Gyx has designed and built a truly magnificent ossuary. In doing so, he has prepared for the eventuality of thieves. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Gyx can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects. He can't use the same lair action two rounds in a row:

- Gyx lets loose a tremendous screech, causing loose bones to tumble down. All creatures inside the ossuary must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw to keep their footing or fall prone and take 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage from the falling bones.
- Gyx beats his massive wings, stirring the stench of decay that emanates from his ossuary and causing it to waft through the area. All creatures inside the ossuary must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or have disadvantage on all rolls until the end of Gyx's next turn.

Regional Effects

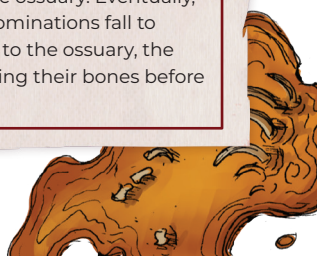
- Due to its magical aura, creatures within 2 miles of the ossuary behave strangely and seem listless. Creatures that would normally keep away from people are seen lurking around the margins of camps and towns. Those that are more accustomed to humanoids become bolder and aggressive. The effect is strongest with magical creatures.
- Tiny boneyard abominations (**cat** or other small beast) are occasionally seen scuttling near the ossuary. The magic that animates them fades 1 mile from the ossuary and they fall apart, leaving a ring of small bones around the area's perimeter.
- The thick magical haze originating from the enchanted items in the ossuary causes disturbances any time a creature attempts to cast a spell in the area. Roll a d12 to determine the effect.

d12	Effect
1	The spell is canceled.
2–3	A large boneyard abomination reanimates as an enemy in a free space closest to the creature casting the spell.
4–5	The target of the spell takes 2 (1d4) psychic damage in addition to the normal effects of the spell.
6–9	The spell is cast as intended.
10–11	The target regains 2 (1d4) hit points in addition to the normal effects of the spell.
12	The spell is cast 1 level above the intended level without using a higher spell slot.



Tiny Boneyard Abominations

Scuttling Scraps. Smaller and much less menacing than their larger counterparts, tiny boneyard abominations are created by the latent magic around the Grand Ossuary, rather than from the twisting of a spell. Often assembled in the form of rogue body parts or chimeras crafted from the bones of dead familiars, these small skeletons animate spontaneously and skuttle around the bone piles. Eventually, they may find their way into the wider world and cross paths with townsfolk or adventurers. Their wanderings are often short-lived, as the magic that animates them fades the farther they move away from the heart of the ossuary. Eventually, it dwindles to nothing, and the mindless abominations fall to pieces once more. When encountered close to the ossuary, the tiny abominations are aggressive, often rattling their bones before leaping onto their target.



Boneyard Abominations

Boneyard abominations are skeletal creatures composed of random bones from various individuals, animated by the magical haze that permeates Gyx's ossuary. Depending on the bones nearby, these abominations may be assembled with any combination of skeletal remains, forming a small or larger creature. For example, one may have the skull of a dragon, the body of a centaur, and the arms of several humanoids, while the next may sport a human skull that scuttles along with the partial ribcage of a wyrm acting like the legs of a giant spider. Each one is different, but all are dangerous and unsettling.

Boneyard Abomination

Large undead, unaligned

Armor Class	13 (natural armor)
Hit Points	33 (6d8 + 6)
Speed	15 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	8 (−1)	17 (−2)	8 (−1)

Skills Intimidation +3

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 13

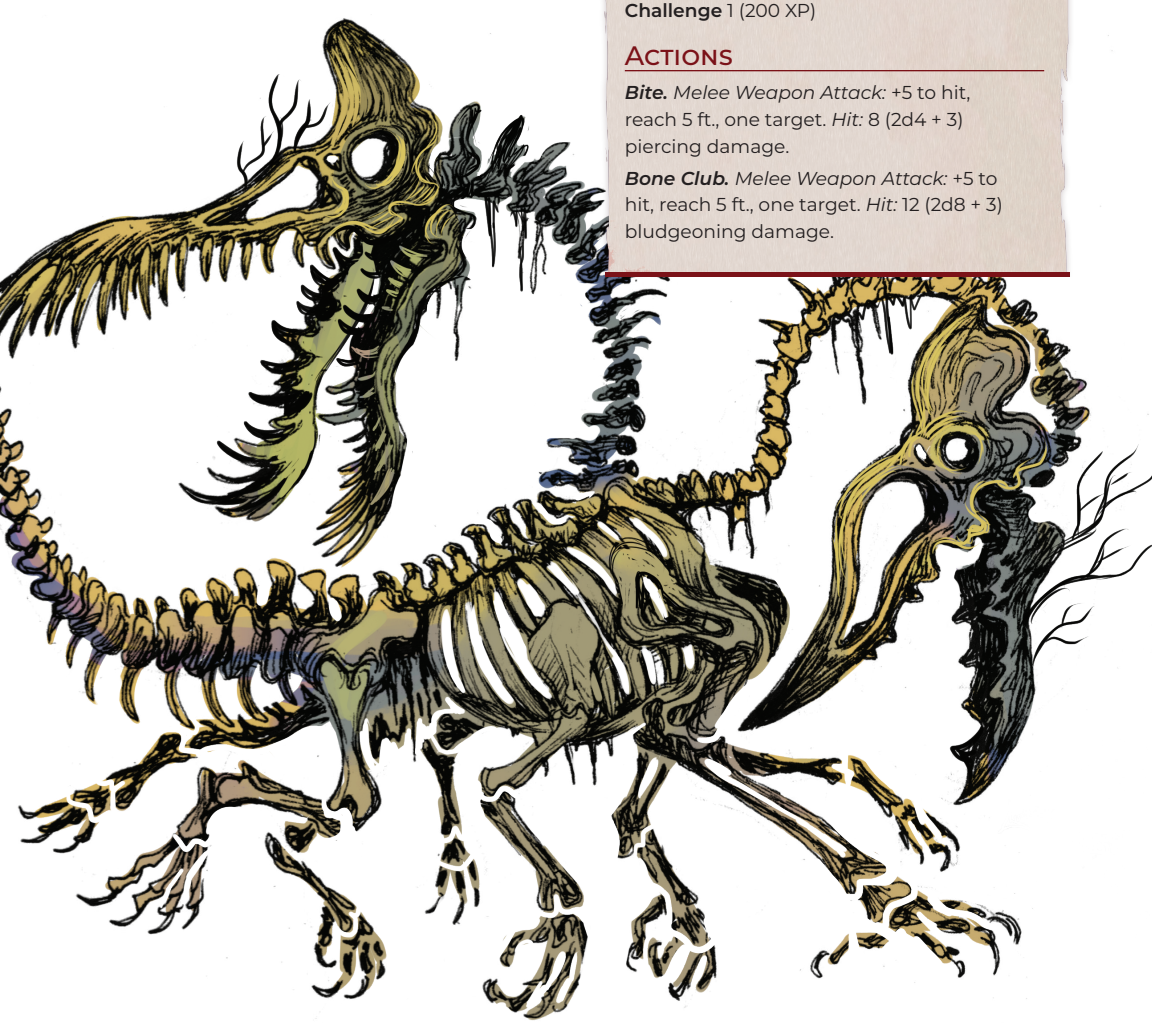
Languages understands all languages the head understood in life but can't speak

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Bone Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.



GYX

OSSUARY ARCHITECT

Huge beast, neutral evil

Armor Class	16 (natural armor)
Hit Points	195 (17d12 + 85)
Speed	15 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	8 (−1)	23 (+6)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Con +10

Skills Intimidation +8, Perception +8

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities blinded, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages Common

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Keen Sight and Smell. Gyx has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight or smell.

Forger's Foe. Gyx can use Wisdom instead of Intelligence when making ability checks and saving throws if he is trying to discern whether or not something is a forgery.

Actions

Multiattack. Gyx makes two attacks: one with his beak and one with his talons.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (4d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d6 + 4) slashing damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 17). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and Gyx can't use his talons on another target.

Expel Acid (Recharge 5–6). Gyx expels stomach acid in a 50-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 55 (10d10) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Legendary Actions

Gyx can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Gyx regains all spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Scavenger's Mark. If a creature has fewer hit points than its maximum, Gyx may mark that creature. Gyx gains advantage when making attack rolls against a marked creature. If the creature is below half its hit point maximum, Gyx deals 2 (1d4) extra damage on a successful attack. Any time the creature returns to full health, Scavenger's Mark ends.

Expel Acid. If Gyx's Expel Acid attack is charged, he uses it. In addition to the acid damage, any creature who takes damage from this attack must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned. A 10-foot-wide pool of acid and rotting meat remains on the ground. Any player who moves into this pool must also succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned.

Divebomb (Costs 2 Actions). Gyx flies up to half his speed and lands on top of a Large or smaller creature. The creature must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage and become grappled (escape DC 17). The target is restrained until this grapple ends, and Gyx can't use his talons on another target. If the creature succeeds on the saving throw, the creature moves 5 feet away from Gyx in the direction of the target's choice.

HARATHOS

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 017	ALIAS: The Chained God
SIZE: Huge	TYPE: Celestial
DANGER LEVEL: 30	DEMEANOR: Awfully Ambitious

WARNING:

BEWARE SOVEREIGNS BEHAVING STRANGELY

NOTES:

We're a long way from having an undercover agent in every royal court across the multiverse, but the potential havoc Harathos could cause if it escaped makes expanding Project Crown Watcher a top priority.

-Chief Runcible Scowler

Concept: David Castro
Writing & Game Design: David Castro, Christopher Pinch
Original Cover: Axel Saurwald
Illustrations: Elliot Lang

BOUND BUT UNBOWED!

> Excerpt from The Psalm of Rule
>
> *To bloody purpose thy will is bound.*
>
> *Heavy is the head that wears the crown.*

Harathos, The Chained God

Stories have long existed of great rulers, lords of vast empires that are no more. Older still are tales of a forgotten tomb deep in the earth, where those who seek the power of ancient rulers must brave the horrors within. Only the worthy, it is said, will emerge. Those chosen few shall be blessed with a gift for rulership and the might to make their ambitions real. Few know the truth behind these tales and the true cost of such blessings.

Underneath the great Mount Corinthel, a god sits on a cold stone, its name all but lost to time. There, bound by chains forged in the heavens, it waits. The god knows that mortals are ambitious creatures, and it bides its time until one such soul should enter its solemn chamber. Even if it takes a thousand years, it matters not. As long as the will to rule exists within the mortal heart, Harathos, the God of Kings, will endure.

Parable of Gods and Sovereigns. Harathos has existed for as long as any being has craved power. Once part of a long-forgotten pantheon, Harathos surpassed even the most powerful deities of its age. Early parables decry the God of Kings as a tyrant who sought to shatter the harmony of the heavens. In truth, Harathos believed a sovereign's steady hand was required to stop the pantheon's petty infighting and bring order to the celestial planes. So it was that Harathos amassed a legion of celestial beings and led them into war against the gods.

During this long and bitter struggle, the Material Plane was ravaged by great earthquakes and tempests—manifestations of the heavens' chaos. These calamities caused famine, disease, and war, leading kingdoms to ruin. As the influence of rulers waned, so too did Harathos' power. Though the old gods suffered terrible losses, the pantheon united, and with their combined power they cast the weakened Harathos down to the Material Plane.

To ensure that Harathos could not return, the gods chained it to an unbreakable rock with five divine shackles that sealed away its strength. Yet, within their hearts, each god secretly harbored a will to rule. This fed Haratho's power even as they shackled it. The old gods resumed their feuds soon after and eventually destroyed themselves. They have since been replaced by a new pantheon. Harathos still waits, plotting its eventual victory.

The King-Maker. Harathos' greatest ambition is to free itself from its prison and resume its conquest of the heavens. The God of Kings has learned from its defeat, however, and will not act rashly. Harathos has a plan, one which has been playing out over the ages. After being cast from the heavens, the chained god spent centuries in meditation, willing five magical rings, the *rings of the bound**, into existence.

Each ring grants its attuned owner phenomenal power but bends the wearer's will to the task of obtaining and maintaining the mantle of sovereignty. Upon the owner's death, the ring-bearer becomes an undead spirit, bound to return to Harathos. The chained god consumes the souls, drawing power from the heights the wearers achieved during their reign. Harathos has consumed countless mortal rulers in this manner and is now finally prepared to break its shackles. To do this, the God of Kings requires that the rings be attuned to great sovereigns. However, over the millennia, some rings have been prevented from returning to Harathos. In such cases, Harathos can use the ring to communicate with nearby mortals, manipulating them or luring them to its tomb with promises of power.

Roleplaying Harathos

Harathos is stoic, subdued, and patient. The chained god is composed and weighs its options carefully before making a decision. Once Harathos commits to a course of action, however, it does not waver. In ancient texts, Harathos is variously called a god of despots and a god of sovereigns. To Harathos, resolve and the will for power are paramount, and the chained god cares little for whether mortals rule as tyrants or liberators so long as they realize a grand ambition.

The God of Kings is direct and perceptive, able to cut to the very core of a being at a glance. Those whom the chained god finds unworthy face death at its hands. Harathos seeks those with ambition in their hearts, and it is these mortals to whom the chained god offers power in exchange for their oath of fealty. Those who battle their way through the many dangers of Harathos' tomb to reach the inner sanctum seldom reject this offer.

Captivated Monarch

Harathos's Tactics

Harathos' main goal is to see its rings fall into the hands of great rulers, or those who have the potential to become them, so that it can break its divine shackles. If someone promising should come across a ring, Harathos guides them to its tomb, promising power and a divine purpose should the bearer prove worthy. Beyond this, the chained god provides only cryptic information. The God of Kings has limited ability to act in the outside world. Should it learn of a plot to interfere with its plans, Harathos instructs those attuned to the *rings of the bound** to put a stop to it.

If sovereigns attuned to the ring achieve greatness, Harathos can summon them to the Chamber of the Rock. Harathos then uses a ritual to transform the ring-bearer into a **solar** under its control, destroying the ring in the process. Unbeknown to the ring-bearers, Harathos will then sacrifice them to break one of the shackles sealing away its power, which takes a full round to accomplish. Harathos can do this multiple times, removing its fetters gradually, or call all the ring-bearers at once. Once freed, Harathos deals with any intruders before leaving the chamber with its servants. Harathos then scours the world for a means to return to the heavens, laying waste to all who stand in its way.

Harathos's Traits

Harathos possesses the following personal characteristics, which reflect its determination.

Personality Trait. "I take no joy in the suffering I cause. A ruler's will must be strong enough to see all ambitions fulfilled."

Ideal. "Sovereigns should stand above their subjects and rule with an unwavering hand. To falter is weakness."

Bond. "I will bring order to the heavens and make the cosmos my kingdom."

Flaw. "I will pursue my ambitions at any cost."

Returned Rulers

Great sovereigns who died attuned to Harathos' rings may be summoned by the god as corporeal undead to use for its ritual. For these returned rulers, use the stat block of a **vampire** with the following exceptions:

- They lose the shapechanger subtype. Replace the Shapechanger, Misty Escape, and Vampire Weaknesses traits with the **zombie's** Undead Fortitude trait.
- They are equipped with a *ring of the bound**.
- Replace their Bite attack and legendary action with this:

  Sovereign's Blade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (1d8 + 7) slashing damage or 12 (1d10 + 7) slashing damage if used with two hands. These attacks are magical.
- Harathos' minions in the Chamber of the Rock do not attack the returned sovereign. They will obey the returned ruler's commands if they align with Harathos' interests.

Chamber of the Rock

The tomb that exists beneath Mount Corinthel is a labyrinthine complex filled with traps and treasures, guarded by powerful beings loyal to Harathos. **Wights**, **wraiths**, and other undead were once the God of King's priests and followers, cursed to undeath when Harathos fell. **Chain devils**, **erinyes**, and other devils also stand watch. They are what remains of Harathos' celestial legion after being cast down with their god. All Harathos' servants are bound to the tomb and cannot venture outside as long as Harathos remains trapped.

All paths within lead to a 50-foot-by-50-foot chamber, where Harathos can be found. Harathos sits on a 20-foot-diameter rock in the chamber's center: an alabaster stone from the heavens, which the gods carved into a crude mockery of a throne. This rock is immovable and indestructible by mortal means. Chains made from a strange green metal anchor Harathos to the rock, allowing it just enough space to touch every wall of the chamber.

Lair Actions

Harathos has meditated for thousands of years in this chamber, which has subsequently become suffused with its divine will. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Harathos takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects. It can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- The earth shakes, and stalactites rain down from the ceiling on a 20-foot-radius area. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.
- Harathos chooses a point within 60 feet of it. The spectral hands of deceased sovereigns grasp and constrict each creature in a 15-foot-radius centered on that point. Creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be paralyzed until the end of their next turn.
- Divine chains mirroring Harathos' own appear, binding the hands of would-be kingslayers. Until initiative count 20 on the next round, each time a creature makes an attack against Harathos, it must roll a d6. On a 1, the attack automatically misses.

Adventure Hooks

Consider the following scenarios if you wish to include Harathos in your campaign.

The Queen Is Dead. Upon returning to the capital, the party learns that the queen of the land died five days prior, passing in her sleep after a long and prosperous reign. Though the kingdom is in mourning, there hasn't yet been a funeral. Stranger still, travelers have spotted a pale woman who resembles the former queen headed on foot toward the distant Mount Corinthel.

Omens of Revelation. Recently, the godly statues in a grand temple have begun to weep blood, a divine portent of impending doom. The archbishop looks to the party, as the mightiest heroes in the realm, to investigate what she thinks may be the cause: a strange divine presence that she has felt stirring somewhere beneath Mount Corinthel since the incident.

Magic Ring. During another quest, the party finds a *ring of the bound**. After, Harathos sends the party visions of a lonely tomb beneath a distant mountain through their dreams. If anyone attempts to attune to the ring, Harathos speaks to the wearer in whispers, explaining that it seeks worthy souls for a divine purpose. Those wishing to prove themselves will find trials waiting in the tomb beneath Mount Corinthel.

Ring of the Bound

Ring, legendary (requires attunement)

These five gold signet rings have a seal on their surface made of a strange green metal. The seal is engraved with a stylized crown and sword: Harathos' holy symbol. As long as Harathos lives, the rings are indestructible and unaffected by effects that disenchant magical items. If Harathos is ever slain, however, the rings lose their powers and shatter.

Harathos knows the exact location of the rings at all times. Harathos can communicate with anyone wearing one of the rings (as if with the *sending* spell) and can send visions to any creature within 3 miles of the ring's location (as if with the *dream* spell). These abilities function whether or not the target is attuned to one of the rings, as long as the target is on the same plane of existence as Harathos. Harathos can see and hear the surroundings within 3 miles of its rings at any time.

King's Covenant. To attune to a ring, you must first enter into a covenant with Harathos. This can only be done by journeying into the tomb beneath Mount Corinthel and presenting the ring to Harathos in person.

Once attuned, you gain the bond "I covet the power of a sovereign ruler, and I will not rest until I obtain my crown" as well as the flaw "I cannot betray Harathos." A *remove curse* spell is the only way to end attunement to the ring. If you end your attunement, you break the covenant. Afterward, divine influence imposes a −5 penalty on all your ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws until you attune to it once more. Only a *wish* spell or equally powerful magic can remove these penalties.

If you die while attuned to a ring, your spirit becomes a **ghost**. Such ghosts can carry a ring into the ethereal plane and are compelled to return it to Harathos.

Blade of the Sovereign. You can cause the ring to transform into a *+3 adamantine longsword*, which you are automatically proficient with, and back again as a bonus action.

Silver Tongue. You gain proficiency with the Deception and Persuasion skills and can add double your proficiency bonus to ability checks you make using them while wearing the ring.

Spells. The ring has 10 charges and regains 1d6 + 4 charges daily at dawn. You can use an action and expend 1 or more of its charges to cast one of the following spells (spell save DC 18) from it: *death ward* (2 charges), *dominate person* (2 charges), *fire storm* (3 charges), *geas* (2 charges), *glibness* (4 charges), *sequester* (3 charges), *suggestion* (1 charge), *true seeing* (2 charges).

HARATHOS

THE CHAINED GOD

Huge celestial, lawful evil

Armor Class	24 (natural armor)
Hit Points	610 (37d12 + 370)
Speed	50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
30 (+10)	18 (+4)	30 (+10)	26 (+8)	25 (+7)	27 (+8)

Saving Throws Dex +13, Con +19, Wis +16, Cha +17

Skills Deception +17, Insight +25, Perception +16, Persuasion +17

Damage Resistances cold, fire, psychic, radiant

Damage Immunities poison, necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, stunned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 26

Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 30 (155,000 XP)

Bound. Harathos is bound by five divine shackles that impose the following penalties. For each shackle that is broken, remove a penalty from the list, beginning with the first, then the second, and so on. With all five shackles intact, Harathos becomes a CR 19 foe.

- Damage dealt by Harathos' attacks, spells, and Blasphemy is reduced by 20, and its hit point maximum is reduced by 75.
- Harathos loses its Regeneration trait, its hit point maximum is reduced by 75, and its immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks becomes resistance instead.
- Harathos loses Limited Magic Immunity, and its hit point maximum is reduced by 75.
- Harathos takes a −5 penalty to its attack rolls, saving throw DCs, and AC, and its hit point maximum is reduced by 75.
- Harathos can't leave the Chamber of the Rock by any means, its speed becomes 15 feet, and its hit point maximum is reduced by 75.

Divine Awareness. Harathos knows if it hears a lie.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Harathos fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Limited Magic Immunity. Unless it wishes to be affected, Harathos is immune to spells of 6th-level or lower. It has advantage on saving throws against all other spells and magical effects.

Regeneration. Harathos regains 30 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point.

Magic Weapons. Harathos's weapon attacks are magical.

Innate Spellcasting. Harathos's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 25). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect thoughts, fog cloud, geas, inflict wounds* (as a 9th-level spell), *wall of fire*

3/day each: *counterspell, disintegrate* (as a 7th-level spell), *hold monster, suggestion*

1/day each: *divine word, fire storm*

Actions

Multiattack. Harathos makes three attacks with its God-forged Chains.

God-forged Chains. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 26 (3d10 + 10) bludgeoning damage plus 18 (4d8) radiant damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 27 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.

Treachery (3/Day). Harathos commands a humanoid creature within 60 feet of it that it can see to obey. The target must succeed on a DC 25 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by Harathos for up to 1 minute.The charmed target is under Harathos' control and can't take reactions. The charmed target can repeat this saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Only one creature can be charmed by this ability at a time.

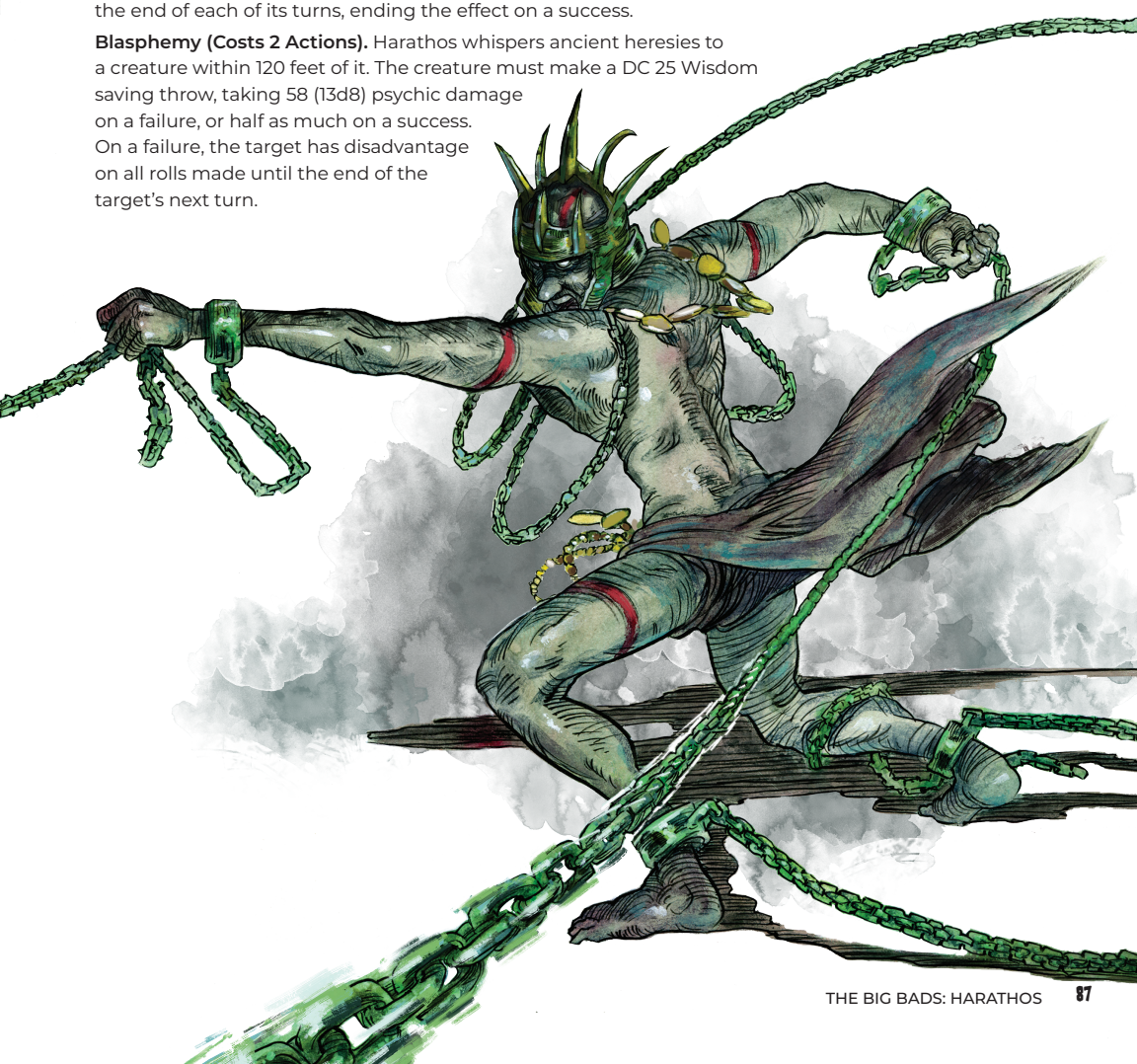
Legendary Actions

Harathos can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Harathos regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Attack. Harathos makes an attack with its God-forged Chains.

Bind. Harathos uses its chains to entangle one creature within 60 feet of it that it can see. The target must succeed on a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw or be restrained. Harathos can spend a bonus action to draw a restrained target up to 60 feet toward it. A restrained target can repeat this saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Blasphemy (Costs 2 Actions). Harathos whispers ancient heresies to a creature within 120 feet of it. The creature must make a DC 25 Wisdom saving throw, taking 58 (13d8) psychic damage on a failure, or half as much on a success. On a failure, the target has disadvantage on all rolls made until the end of the target's next turn.



THE HORNED GIANT

BIG BAD BUREAU CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: CLASSIFIED	ALIAS: Telyfios Manifested
SIZE: Huge	TYPE: Construct
DANGER LEVEL: 28	DEMEANOR: Dormant, For Now

WARNING:

IF SIGHTED, ACTIVATE LIVING HELL PROTOCOL

NOTES:

Luckily for all of us, this Big Bad has remained inactive for as almost as long as the Bureau has kept records. We've had reports that another Big Bad, Akkadia, has been hunting for the Horned Giant's pieces. Nothing good ever comes from one Big Bad digging up another.

-Chief Runcible Scowler

FRAGMENTS OF HISTORY

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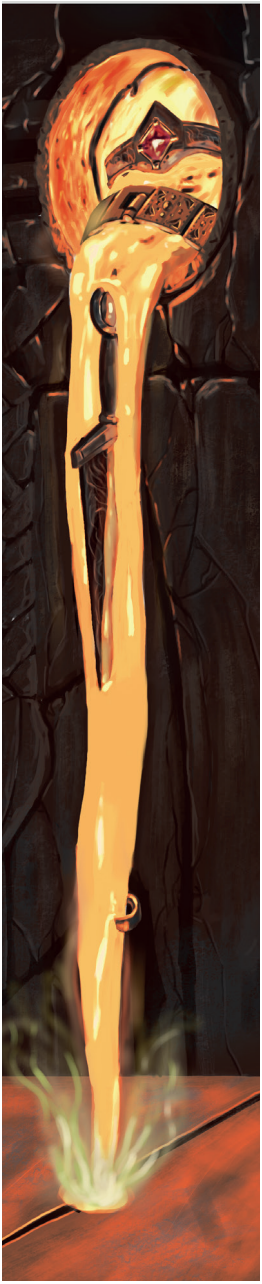


DOOM REBUILT

The Horned Giant, Telyfios Manifested

Forgotten History. The origins of the **Horned Giant** lie deep in the forgotten past, and there are those who work to make sure the past stays forgotten. The true name of the Horned Giant is Telyfios, an archfiend from the depths of the hells. The broken statue is what remains from Telyfios' thwarted attempt to enter the Material Plane eons ago. With the scattered pieces of the Horned Giant reconnected, Telyfios can continue its dreadful plot.

Patient Plans. The archfiend Telyfios is among the most patient of devils. It has a particular knack for manipulating the desperation of mortals. Long ago, it set in motion a plan to manifest itself in the Material Plane. Just outside the smallfolk settlement of Apoygeti lived a family of stone giants, Dunya, Petradore, and their daughter **Pylenthia**. Dunya was the finest sculptor of his age, crafting bronzes for both his giantkin and the temples of smallfolk. Telyfios singled Dunya out to suffer, using his pain to manipulate him into creating a vessel worthy of holding the archfiend's phenomenal power.

First, through subtle influence, Telyfios stoked tensions between the giant clans until war broke out. Petradore left her family to fight and never returned from the battlefield. Next, Telyfios targeted Pylenthia, inflicting a disease on the young giant. Dunya, already distraught at the loss of his wife, watched as his daughter grew weaker and weaker. Afraid of losing her, too, he began searching for a cure.

Devilish Dreams. Dunya's despair opened a crack in his psyche that Telyfios could slither into. The archfiend began to speak to the stone giant in his dreams, first as only a whisper but growing louder with each passing night. Masquerading as a spirit of healing, Telyfios promised to cure Pylenthia if only Dunya would create a statue that it could inhabit.

In the morning, Dunya awoke to find a supply of the finest bronze on his doorstep, big enough to sculpt a statue as large as himself. It had been left by the **Cultists of Telyfios**, a sect dedicated to drawing the archfiend into the world in exchange for immortality. As Dunya worked tirelessly, Pylenthia could see that something dark had overtaken her father. With the last of her strength, she climbed from her bed and begged him to stop crafting the cursed statue. But Dunya could no longer hear his daughter. His mind was filled only with Telyfios' whispered promises of eternal life for Pylenthia.

Missing Magic Pieces. With the statue nearing completion, Telyfios instructed Dunya to secure the final elements required. Bringing even a small fraction of an archfiend's power into the Material Plane required immense power. Dunya's statue, a perfect replica of a stone giant down to the curve of each tendon and muscle, would provide the vessel, but powerful magic items were also needed to allow Telyfios to inhabit it. The once peaceful Dunya walked to Apoygeti, the nearby human city, and raided it for the required magic

items, ignoring the screams of those he crushed in his frantic search and the puny arrows they fired at him. Soon, the arcane vaults of Apoygeti lay in ruins, and Dunya had what he needed.

Telyfios Enters. Holding Pylenthia to his chest, Dunya poured the molten bronze into the mold and the magic items he had stolen—a headband, a sword, a ring, and a belt. Before the bronze could cool, the mold split apart, revealing the most beautiful bronze statue of a stone giant ever crafted, glowing with heat and Telyfios' power. As the stunned giants watched, two great horns grew from the statue's forehead, and its expression, crafted to be one of stoic grace, twisted into a cruel smile as fangs sprouted from the mouth. The Horned Giant statue stepped forward, infused with Telyfios' power.

Life for Life. Stretching out its bronze arms towards the two giants, the Horned Giant fulfilled its promise to Dunya. It granted Pylenthia eternal life by ripping the life from Dunya's body and the lives of all living creatures nearby. Pylenthia clung to her father's body and looked up. All around the moving statue, smallfolk cultists were bowing. With another flash of sickly yellow light, all the lives in Apoygeti, from the people to the tiniest flies, ended as Telyfios granted eternal life to his cultists. Promises fulfilled, the Horned Giant stalked away from the dead city, leaving only Pylenthia and the cultists reeling from being touched by its power.

The Horned Giant Walks. News of the Horned Giant and the devastation of Apoygeti spread quickly. Giantfolk and smallfolk alike grappled with the new threat. Now that it was incarnate in the world, Telyfios could wreak havoc as it wished. It amused him to offer eternal life and snatch the lives of mortals to make this gift possible. It only took one person in each town willing to make a bargain with him for the Horned Giant to Telyfios snuff out settlement after settlement, carving a trail of devastation across the land.

Council of Dismay. In the face of the shared threat, the giant clans ceased their warring and gathered to address the problem. The Horned Giant's massive stature made it clear that giants were involved somehow, and many of the smallfolk blamed them. The council called to address the issue quickly fell into bickering, with some denying that The Horned Giant was a problem for giants at all and others wanting to display their strength by destroying it. The clans were on the brink of bloodshed when Pylenthia threw open the doors of the council chamber. She told the gathered giants what had happened to her father and of her plan to destroy the Horned Giant before it could hurt any more people. A hush fell over the chamber. Even those who had proposed action were silent. Something about the young giant unsettled them. The leaders withdrew to discuss. Eventually, they agreed to join Pylenthia's mission, though none could say exactly why she disturbed them so much.

Hidden Records. Today, only a few fragments of pottery record the giants' epic fight against Telyfio, depicting giants pulling loose the magic items from the dismembered statue. The shards only show the final moments, and nothing of the Horned Giant killing dozens of giants who dared stand against him, nor Pylenthia wielding her father's masonry hammer to strike the final blow that shattered the statue. The battle was long and bloody, but the giants prevailed. With his vessel shattered, Telfios was trapped within the bronze fragments before he could escape to the Lower Planes.

Cursed Immortality. In the aftermath, Pylenthia took it upon herself to ensure Telyfios could never return. She carried the pieces of her father's statue across the world, hiding them where she hoped no one would ever find them. During her long travels, Pylenthia began to realize the curse she had been burdened with. Other people could sense Telyfios' corruption within her. People turned against her, driving her away and rejecting her wherever she went. Over centuries, the second aspect of the curse became clear. Pylenthia could not die. She watched empires rise and fall, always alone and friendless. Still, she never wavered in her dedication to preventing Telyfios from rising again. Several times, the pieces of the statue were recovered, and she had to retrieve them and hide them away again. She tried to stamp out all mentions of Telyfios' story, especially the tales of extraordinary healing and the gift of immortality.

But Pylenthia was not the only one who Telyfios had cursed with immortality. His cultists still lived. Some regret their choice and live lives of enforced solitude. Others, the true believers, are dedicated to bringing the Horned Giant back, seeding knowledge here and there, hoping to attract the attention of those who might bring Telyfios back. However, they had to act carefully not to attract so much attention that they risked bringing Pylenthia's wrath down upon themselves, as whenever she found the cultists, she wiped them out.

CURSE OF TELYFIOS

Creatures with the Curse of Telyfios gain the following traits:

- ***Immunities.*** The cursed creature has immunity to poison and necrotic damage and the poisoned condition.
- ***Language.*** The cursed creature can speak and understand Infernal.
- ***Undying.*** The cursed creature is immune to disease and can't be aged magically or naturally. Its physical age remains the same as it was when it was cursed by Telyfios.
- ***Unsettling.*** The cursed creature has disadvantage on all Charisma checks. After meeting it, other creatures become hostile towards the cursed creature over the course of 1d10 days.

Reconnecting the Past. The past few centuries have been quiet for Pylenthia. She believes the cultists have finally given up or vanished. She retreated to an isolated cave and now spends much of her immortal life sleeping, dreaming of the happy days of her youth. Unfortunately, the cultists are not gone; they are merely waiting patiently for the right moment. They laid the clues that the Domarov sisters, better known as Akkadia, have been following. Now, Telyfios' return is at hand. With the pieces of the shattered statue connected once more with powerful magic items, The Horned Giant will be revived and begin his rampage once more.

When resurrected, the Horned Giant first rewards those who were instrumental in its return, cursing them with the Curse of Telyfios, draining any nearby life to do so.

Roleplaying The Horned Giant

The fiend that inhabits the Horned Giant, Telyfios, is the embodiment of the selfish desire for eternal life at any cost. While the Horned Giant thrives in destruction, what it wants most is to make bargains with mortals, offering them immortality for themselves or their loved ones in exchange for their willingness to sacrifice others. When it speaks, the Horned Giant's voice is deep and filled with resonant tones like a great bell ringing. It has immense confidence and certainty.

The Horned Giant will parley as long as it believes it has a chance of luring someone into a bargain. It knows that what it offers is highly valued, enough for many people to put aside their morals in desperation, especially if the Horned Giant has already schemed to place them in an impossible position.

The Horned Giant's Tactics

In combat, the Horned Giant relies on its immense strength and durability to withstand all but the strongest attacks. It uses the power of the magic items embedded within its body freely, as well as its own fiendish abilities. Despite its incredible power, the Horned Giant is limited by its physical form. Even reconnected with magic items, the ancient cracks in its body remain, leaving the Horned Giant vulnerable to dismemberment.

The Horned Giant's greatest power is bestowing his curse and killing all things nearby to do so. However, it can't use this power unless another creature requests eternal life for itself or another. If the Horned Giant can convince a creature to make a bargain, it will use its curse to cause massive damage. Should it come under attack by superior force, the Horned Giant will retreat, carrying away any parts of itself that have been broken off. After centuries of being imprisoned within the broken statue, Telyfios fears being dismembered and trapped again.

The Horned Giant's Traits

Ideal. "Given the right circumstances, the lure of immortality is stronger than any morals a creature may profess."

Bond. "The endless suffering of my cultists amuses me."

Flaw. "I prefer to whittle away an adversary's hope even when destroying them would be safer."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include the Horned Giant in your campaign.

The Power of Gold. Patrix Palaio is an undying **Cultist of Telyfios** who has amassed massive wealth over thousands of years. He is offering an incredibly valuable reward to any adventuring party who can find both the shattered pieces of the Horned Giant statue and the magic items needed to reconstruct it. Patrix directs the search from the shadows, hoping that bringing Telyfios back will lift his curse and allow him to enjoy his eternal life without becoming despised by all who meet him face to face.

The Sleeping Giant. The party stumbles on **Pylenthia** sleeping in a cave. When she awakens and realizes how long she has been asleep, she asks for the party's help in checking that the Horned Giant's broken pieces remain scattered.

Telyfios Returned. The Mirror Mage, **Akkaidia**, has successfully stolen the magic items needed to reconstruct the Horned Giant. But the incarnate archfiend is not what the Domarov sisters expected. It has already killed hundreds. The sisters call on the adventuring party to help fix their mistake and banish the Horned Giant.

The Cult of Telyfios

The Cult of Telyfios has persisted over the ages, hiding in shadows. Today, almost all the cultists are still those who received eternal life the first time the Horned Giant threatened the world. The cultists deludedly believe that the Curse of Telyfios that causes other creatures to hate them will be lifted once they return the Horned Giant to the world again.

Cultist of Telyfios

Medium or Small humanoid (any race), any evil alignment

Armor Class 11 (14 with mage armor)
Hit Points 85 (9d8 + 45)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	13 (+1)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	8 (–1)

Saving Throws Con +7, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +4, Perception +4, Stealth +3

Damage Immunities poison, necrotic

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Infernal, and two other languages

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Special Traits

Dark Devotion. The cultist has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Undying. The cultist is immune to disease and can't be aged magically or naturally. Its physical age remains the same as it was when it was cursed by Telyfios.

Unsettling. The cultist has disadvantage on all Charisma checks. After meeting it, other creatures become hostile towards the cultist over the course of 1d10 days.

Spellcasting. The cultist is a 5th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The cultist has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, light, message, ray of frost, shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *disguise self, expeditious retreat, mage armor*^

2nd level (3 slots): *scorching ray, suggestion*

3rd level (2 slots): *counterspell*

^ The cultist casts this spell on itself before combat.

Actions

Multiattack. The cultist makes two light hammer attacks.

Light Hammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

Reactions

Old Tricks. When the cultist is hit with a melee attack, it can use its reaction to disengage and move up to its speed.

PYLENTHIA

Huge giant, neutral good

Armor Class	17 (natural armor)
Hit Points	200 (16d12 + 96)
Speed	40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	15 (+2)	22 (+6)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	8 (–1)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +10, Wis +7

Skills Arcana +6, Athletics +10, Perception +7

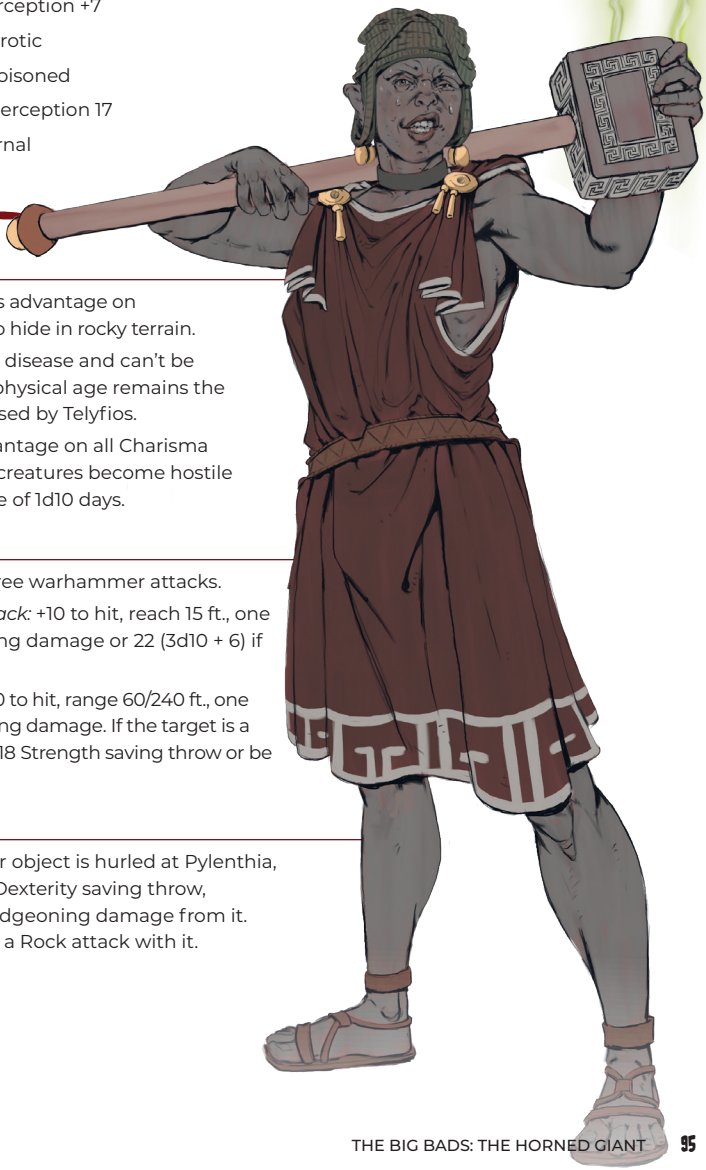
Damage Immunities poison, necrotic

Condition Immunities disease, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 17

Languages Common, Giant, Infernal

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)



Special Traits

Stone Camouflage. Pylenthia has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in rocky terrain.

Undying. Pylenthia is immune to disease and can't be aged magically or naturally. Her physical age remains the same as it was when she was cursed by Telyfios.

Unsettling. Pylenthia has disadvantage on all Charisma checks. After meeting her, other creatures become hostile towards Pylenthia over the course of 1d10 days.

Actions

Multiattack. Pylenthia makes three warhammer attacks.

Warhammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage or 22 (3d10 + 6) if used with two hands.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 28 (4d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Reactions

Rock Catching. If a rock or similar object is hurled at Pylenthia, she can, with a successful DC 10 Dexterity saving throw, catch the missile and take no bludgeoning damage from it. Pylenthia can immediately make a Rock attack with it.

THE HORNED GIANT

TELYFIOS MANIFESTED

Huge construct, lawful evil

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)
Hit Points 493 (34d12+272)
Speed 45 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	20 (+5)	26 (+8)	25 (+7)	27 (+8)	28 (+9)

Saving Throws Str +15, Con +16, Wis +16, Cha +17

Skills Deception +17, Insight +16, Perception +16

Damage Resistances cold, lightning, psychic, thunder

Damage Immunities fire, necrotic, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, stunned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 26

Languages All, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 28 (120,000 XP)

Special Traits

Attuned Construction. The horned giant is attuned to the four magic items that were used to reconnect its body parts and can use any magical effects of the items as a Legendary Action. These magic items are embedded within the horned giant's body and cannot be removed without first breaking off an associated body part.

Destructible. When the horned giant falls below 200 hit points, one of its body parts is broken off, chosen by the creature that inflicted the damage. The horned giant loses an additional body part when it falls below 140 and 80 hit points. As the horned giant loses a body part, its AC decreases by 1, and it suffers an additional drawback determined by the body part lost:

> **Head.** The horned giant can no longer use its Hellfire or Gore attack and loses the benefits of the magic item in its head.
>
> **Left Arm.** The horned giant can't use its Ring Empowered Slam, makes 1 fewer slam attack, and loses the magical benefits of its ring.
>
> **Right Arm.** The horned giant can't use its Sword Empowered Slam, makes 1 fewer slam attack, and loses the magical benefits of its sword.
>
> **Leg.** The horned giant's movement speed decreases to 10 feet, it can no longer take the Dash action, and it loses the benefits of its belt.

Fiendish Construct. The horned giant doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep. If the horned giant is reduced to 0 hit points, the devil Telyfios that animates becomes trapped within the dismantled pieces of the statue.

Immutable Form. The horned giant is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the horned giant fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The horned giant has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The horned giant's attacks are magical.

Actions

Multiattack. The horned giant makes four attacks; one with its Gore or Hellfire, and three with one of its Slams.

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 10 ft., one or two targets within 5 ft. of each other *Hit:* 25 (4d8 + 7) piercing damage.

Hellfire (Recharge 5–6). The horned giant exhales a fiery barrage of energy in a 50-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 25 Constitution saving throw, taking 39 (6d12) fire damage and 38 (7d10) necrotic damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. The hellfire also ignites the ground in the area of the cone for 1 minute. Creatures that end their turn in the area while it is on fire take an additional 26 (4d12) damage.

Slam. The horned giant uses one of the following slam attacks.

Base Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (3d8 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Ring Empowered Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +18 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit*: 23 (3d8 + 10) bludgeoning damage. This attack acts as if it were made with adamantium.

Sword Empowered Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +18 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (3d8 + 10) bludgeoning damage and the target must make a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw. On a failure, a creature loses 2 points of Intelligence.

Reactions

Death Thief. When a creature within 100 feet of the horned giant dies, the horned giant can choose to regain hit points equal to a roll of the creature's total hit dice. Alternatively, the horned giant can grant this healing to one of its allies within 60 feet of it.

Legendary Actions

The horned giant can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The horned giant regains all spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Attack. The horned giant makes one Gore or Slam attack.

Use Item (Costs 2 Actions). The horned giant activates one of the magic items embedded within itself to activate a property of that item, such as casting a spell or a .

Curse (Costs 3 Actions). The horned giant targets one willing or incapacitated creature within 30 feet and bestows the Curse of Telyfios on it. Every other creature of the horned giant's choice within 1 mile must make a DC 25 Constitution saving throw, taking 52 (8d12) damage on a failed save and half as much on a successful one.

The Horned Giant's statistics will be different depending on which magic items were used to reconstruct it. The statistics here assume that *Al-Babbage**, a *ring of the bound**, a *bracelet of giant teeth**, and the *gem of whirling cosmic thought** were used and have been included in the Horned Giant's traits and attacks. Swap out any of these for similar magic items as your campaign requires, adding any bonuses to attack and damage or other effects granted by a magic ring or sword to the Horned Giant's base slam attack.

THE HYDRAIL

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 018	ALIAS: The Mighty Mollusk
SIZE: Gargantuan	TYPE: Monstrosity
DANGER LEVEL: 11	DEMEANOR: Slow & Sticky

WARNING:

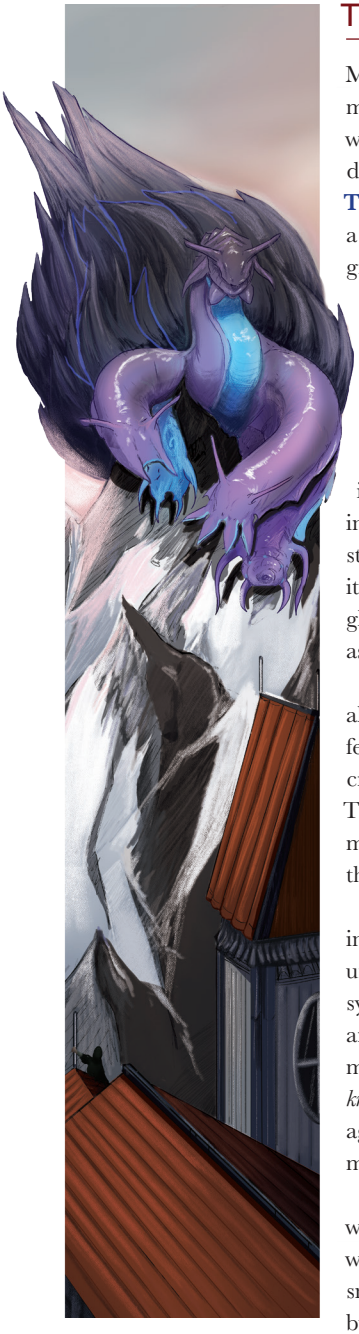
TOUGH SHELL TO CRACK

NOTES:

You'd think that something this slow couldn't be that much of a threat. That's what Agent Blurns thought, and his colleagues had to scrape him up and bring him back to HQ in a bucket.

-Dr. Junfeng Zhang, Department of Resurrection

Concept: Jennifer Adcock
Writing & Game Design: Jennifer Adcock
Original Cover: Kelley Harris
Illustrations: Riley Easter



SLOW... & DEADLY!

The Hydrail, Mighty Mollusk

Magical monstrosities are often born from a combination of foul magic and neglect. The powerful magical energies found in dungeons, wizard towers, and lich lairs can create potent effects on the natural denizens of their environment, down to the most humble creature. **The Hydrail** was once an ordinary garden snail; an ochre jelly and a spill from a carelessly dropped potion bottle set in motion a magical growth that would soon be irreversible.

The Wizard Lymnus. The Hydrail is the name given to the transformed snail by its accidental creator, a wizard by the name of Lymnus. Lymnus went on a grand magical adventure, leaving his tower neglected for several months. Upon his return, he found his laboratory in complete disarray, with his collection of potions and spell components scattered and spilled all over. At first suspecting incompetent burglars, he discovered that his tower had become inhabited by a large, twisted snail the size of a large house cat. The strange creature, seemingly hungry for magical materials, had made itself at home. With five heads and doleful eye stalks, not to mention a glittering shell coloration, Lymnus dubbed the creature "the Hydrail," as it appeared to be some strange combination of snail and hydra.

When Lymnus discovered that the snail's mucus had potent alchemical properties, he decided to conduct experiments on it. He fed the snail magical waste: leftover potion ingredients, remnants from crafting magical items, a worn-out spell component pouch, and so on. The Hydrail got stronger—its shell repelled magical effects, and its mucus became an even more powerful potion reagent. The stronger the Hydrail became, the larger it grew.

A Minor Threat…at First. Lymnus, driven only by self-interest in the Hydrail's alchemical slime, continued to feed and grow the unusual creature with careless abandon. For a time, he maintained a symbiotic relationship with it, but once Hydrail reached the size of an average bear, Lymnus began struggling to control the creature's meal times. As a precaution, Lymnus began designing a magic *salt knife,* specially made to stop the Hydrail, but the creature's increasing aggression and fierce protectiveness of the laboratory and its contents made construction of the knife impossible.

After one particularly harrowing encounter in the stockroom, in which the Hydrail nearly bit Lymnus's arm right off his shoulder, the wizard decided to cut his losses and abandon the tower to the mutated snail. He took his notes, experiments, and the plans for the *salt knife*, but in his haste (and fear of the Hydrail), Lymnus left behind enough magical remnants for the snail to feed on for quite some time. Alone, the Hydrail gorged itself, growing ever larger and developing new magical abilities.

Unpredictable Growth. The Hydrail continued to feed and grow until the abandoned tower could no longer provide for it. When its food sources ran dry, the Hydrail began to wander the countryside in search of its next meal.

Caravans, traveling mages, and natural magical sites were its most common targets, but as the Hydrail got closer to more civilized areas, a new source of food arose. Oozes and slimes, creatures born of alchemical waste, proved to be an excellent source of the magical energies it craved. This new diet allowed new abilities to manifest, the toxic oozes building up the Hydrail's resistances to even the most potent poisons and acids, as well as turning its spit into a corrosive, deadly liquid. As it has grown larger and larger, small oozes and slimes have begun living inside its shell—a convenient food source and a convenient defense against intruders.

Attracting Opportunists. Where there is a storm cloud, there is always a silver lining; villagers in areas that have been ravaged by the Hydrail as it searches for magical food have begun harvesting the snail's mucus in the aftermath. The mucus sells for a high price, as it can be used to strengthen potion recipes, making them more effective or more durable. Even the acids and poisons the Hydrail spits can be used to deter pests or diluted into strong cleaning agents.

As such, a small band of alchemists and apothecaries follow the Hydrail's rampage, warning villages and towns to evacuate ahead of its arrival, but never interrupting the snail, lest they lose their primary source of profit.

There are also adventurers and explorers who recognize the Hydrail's hunger can lead them to areas of dense magical energy, undiscovered dungeons, and abandoned magical relics. Those who simply follow in the wake of the Hydrail are seldom endangered; it seems to ignore those who gather mucus and acid or simply watch the snail to see where it goes. Those reckless few who have attempted to tame or ride the Hydrail faced much more painful fates. None have yet dared to stand between the monstrous snail and its next meal.

Other Experiments. Despite Lymnus's best efforts, intrepid adventurers and scavengers discovered his abandoned tower and learned the truth of how the Hydrail came to be. Those who consider the Hydrail's existence profitable, and those too foolhardy to know their own limits, have attempted to recreate the circumstances of the twisted snail's creation, capturing garden snails and intentionally feeding them magical components. Most of these feeble creatures do not survive the overwhelming energies of the arcane runoff, and so the Hydrail remains unique in its size and power.

Salt in the Wound. The wizard Lymnus has successfully created his design of the *salt knife** in an attempt to stop the destruction that the Hydrail—a product of his own greed—has caused. Unable to accomplish this himself, Lymnus has started sponsoring adventuring groups to destroy the Hydrail, so far without success.

The source of the Hydrail's most fearsome power—the ability to regrow heads, just like a true hydra—comes from a regenerative organ located within the upper portion of its shell. For every head the Hydrail loses, it continues to grow two more until this organ is destroyed. Unfortunately for those who would fight the Hydrail, the organ is only accessible by climbing into the shell itself, which is now approximately 20 feet long, 20 feet wide, and over 30 feet tall.

Once the regenerative organ is located within the shell, it must be destroyed using the *salt knife**: a specially enchanted dagger with a blade forged entirely out of crystalline salt. After the organ is destroyed, the Hydrail no longer regenerates heads, allowing it to be fought with significantly more ease. The Hydrail is not a fast creature, despite its magical nature, so speed and tactics can bring it to heel.

Roleplaying The Hydrail

The Hydrail has developed greater intelligence than the common garden snail it once was, but it is still nowhere near sapience. It is driven entirely by an endless hunger for magical (and occasionally mundane) food. As such, the Hydrail travels to places with great magical auras and vast amounts of accessible food.

The massive snail may be drawn away from a meal by the clever use of bait. The lurer must take care not to get caught too close to the trap or bait that they set, however, as the Hydrail is not a particularly cautious eater.

The Hydrail's Tactics

The Hydrail seldom strikes first, only becoming violent when drawn away or distracted from the meal at hand. It avoids close-quarters combat when possible, preferring to spit slimes and fungi at its foes from a distance. The Hydrail knows that its shell protects its vital organs, so the nearest hostile is likely to be attacked first. The Hydrail has deadly accuracy with its spit attacks, only biting as a last resort.

When the Hydrail reaches a quarter of or less than its maximum hit points and starting number of heads, it withdraws into its shell to wait out the assault. Many an adventurer has mistaken the withdrawn Hydrail for an empty shell, only to realize their mistake too late.

Few foes expect the mighty roar of the Hydrail, as it is otherwise nearly silent. Though it is capable of gliding along quietly, if sufficiently provoked it unleashes a terrifying roar that can frighten enemies. The Hydrail typically does not roar until already engaged in combat, and not until foes have gotten close enough to suffer the full effect. Due to its size, the Hydrail's roar can be heard from a great distance, though those who are not within eyesight are rarely able to identify the noise.

The Hydrail's Regeneration Organ

Hidden inside the vast shell of the Hydrail is the stony organ that allows it to grow and regenerate new heads. The regenerative energy exuded from this body part has also made it incredibly difficult to destroy.

The regeneration organ can only be destroyed by using the *salt knife**, a specially treated magic weapon that is able to pierce through the layers of built up magical energy.

The organ itself has 40 hit points, has an AC of 16, and is immune to all damage except from the *salt knife**.

Without access to the *salt knife**, options are limited for stopping the regenerative abilities of the Hydrail. Casting an *antimagic field* around the organ changes its immunity to all damage to a resistance to all damage for 1 minute, after which the organ returns to its original state.

The Hydrail's Traits

Ideal. "Magical food will make me larger and stronger. Magical food is the only way to be safe."

Bond. "My only allegiance is to myself and to protecting my regenerative powers."

Flaw. "I am insatiable and fight others for even a small scrap of magical food."

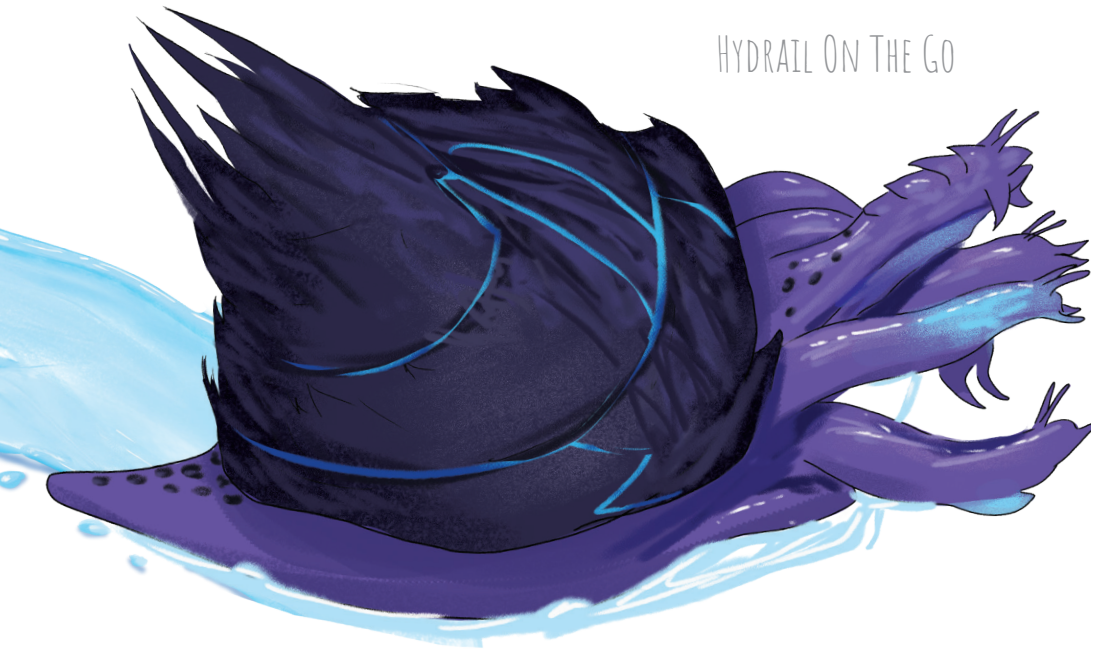
Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include the Hydrail in your campaign:

Dug too Deep. A group of dwarves have uncovered a massive source of magical power near the surface of their preliminary dig and have drawn the attention of the Hydrail. The dwarves recruit the party to get rid of the mighty mollusk, by any means necessary.

A Wizard's Mistakes. The party is contacted by Lymnus, the wizard from whose tower the Hydrail originated. He knows of the party by reputation, and he hopes that they will be able to finish what he could not. He promises great magical knowledge if the Hydrail is permanently dealt with, as he is desperate to stop the disastrous creation for which he is responsible.

The Harvest Festival. A small village conducts a large annual harvest festival, during which the town's arcanists and priests join forces to create a magical enchantment to improve the year's crops. Unfortunately, this year's festival has attracted the attention of the Hydrail, as the accumulation of magical materials for the harvest ritual have drawn it toward the village. The mayor offers a reward for anyone who can help fend the monster off or keep it away so that the harvest festival can go on as planned.



Traveling Home

While the Hydrail may temporarily inhabit all kinds of dungeons and wizard towers as well as roam freely in the wilds, its true lair is the home it carries—the shell on its back. It is this shell that grants the Hydrail protection and shelter in any situation.

Multi-Chambered Shell. The shell is subdivided into three chambers, which run most of the length of the massive snail's body. Closest to the ground are two side-by-side chambers that are each approximately 15 feet long and 10 feet wide. One of these chambers is accessible from the front of the shell, near where the Hydrail's necks merge into the rest of its body, and the other is accessible from the rear of the shell.

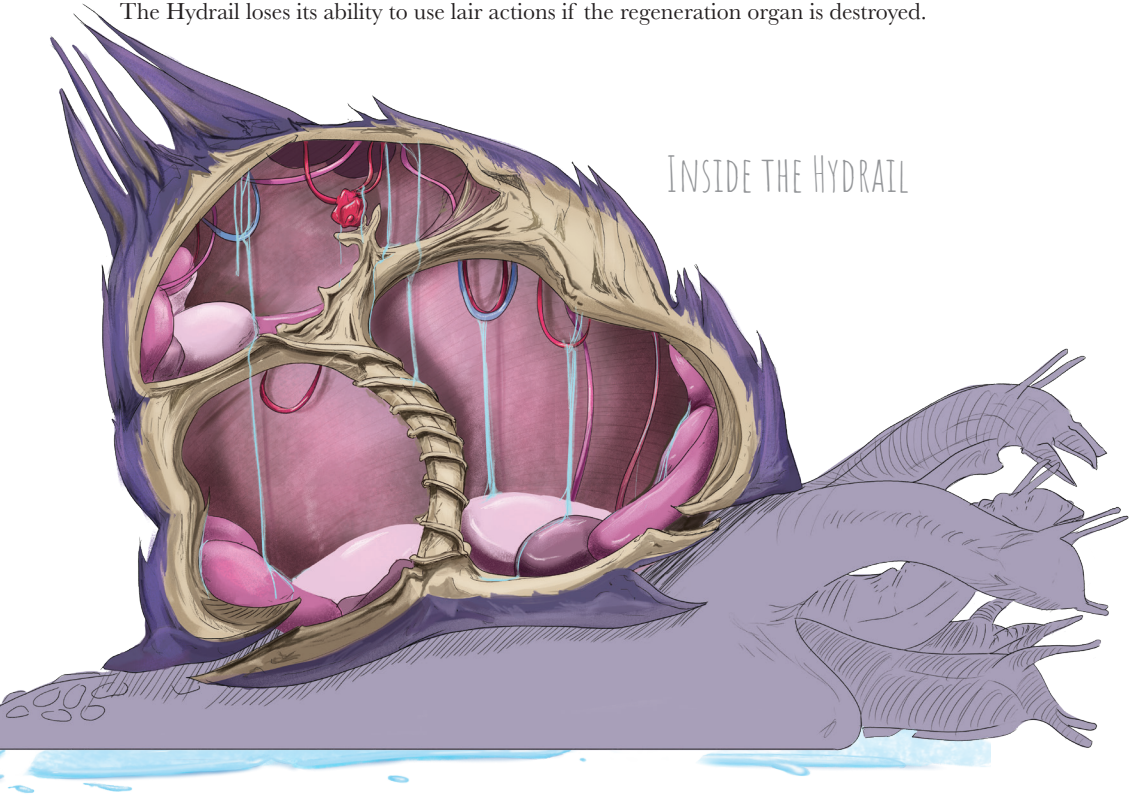
From either of the two lower chambers, it is possible to climb into the upper chamber, which is also approximately 10 by 15 feet. This upper chamber contains the regeneration organ that allows the Hydrail to regenerate its heads.

Lair Actions

When an enemy has breached the shell, the Hydrail is able to use its innate magic to take lair actions to hinder the intruder. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), it takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- The interior walls of the shell become thick with slime, causing any ability checks to climb walls within the shell to be made at disadvantage and making them difficult terrain.
- The Hydrail spawns a **violet fungus** or **gray ooze** (GM's choice) in a space within its shell.
- A new head spawns within the shell, not yet ready to emerge. The head takes the Bite action against the intruder. If the Hydrail has withdrawn inside its shell, it can make a second Bite attack when taking this action.

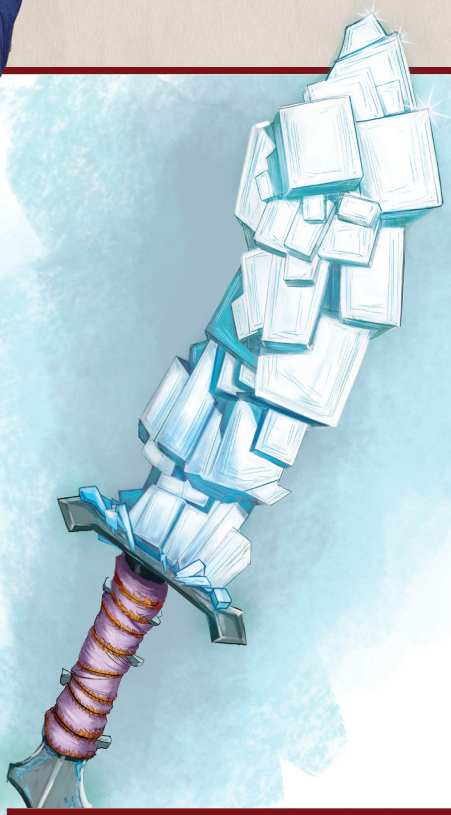
The Hydrail loses its ability to use lair actions if the regeneration organ is destroyed.



Hydrail Shield

Shield, rare (requires attunement)

Pieces of the Hydrail's shell can be refashioned into a shield by an armorer. While holding this shield, you have a +2 bonus to AC and have resistance to acid damage. This bonus is in addition to the shield's normal bonus to AC.



Salt Knife

Weapon (dagger), rare

The blade of this dagger is a salt crystal enchanted with a specially designed magic ritual. This is the only known weapon that can damage the regeneration organ of the Hydrail.

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

Oil of Hydrail Mucus

Potion, very rare

When properly distilled, the Hydrail's mucus acts as a strengthener to other potions. Adding this oil to an existing potion has one of the following effects of your choice:

- The potion heals an extra die of damage.
- Effects from this potion deal twice as much damage as normal.
- Effects from this potion last twice as long.
- This potion doubles in volume, making enough for two effective potion uses.

THE HYDRAIL

THE MIGHTY MOLLUSK

Gargantuan monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 186 (12d20 + 60)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	5 (−3)	22 (+6)	5 (−3)	11 (+0)	5 (−3)

Saving Throws Con +9

Skills Perception +4

Damage Immunities acid, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned, prone

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages —

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Antimagic Shell. The Hydrail has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects, and any creature making a spell attack against the snail has disadvantage on the attack roll.

Death Roar. When the Hydrail dies, it lets out one final roar. All creatures within 600 feet that can hear the Hydrail must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) thunder damage on a failure or half as much on a success.

Multiple Heads. The Hydrail has five heads. While it has more than one head intact, it has advantage on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned, and knocked unconscious. Whenever the Hydrail takes 25 or more damage in a single turn, one of its heads dies. If all its heads are destroyed, the Hydrail dies.

At the end of its turn, the Hydrail grows two heads for each head it lost since its last turn, unless the special regeneration organ within its shell has been destroyed. The Hydrail regains 25 hit points for each head regrown in this way.

Wakeful. While the Hydrail sleeps, at least one of its heads is awake.

Actions

Multiattack. The Hydrail takes as many Acid Spit or Bite actions as it has heads, and it is able to split these attacks however it wishes.

Acid Spit. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) acid damage.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) piercing damage.

Roar. The Hydrail lets out a fearsome roar—an unearthly and frightening noise. All creatures within 300 feet who can hear the snail must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature that is within the Hydrail's shell attempts this saving throw with disadvantage. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the target is immune to the Hydrail's Roar for the next 24 hours.

Shell Withdraw. The Hydrail withdraws into its shell, gaining a +5 bonus to AC against attacks from outside the shell until it emerges. It can emerge as a bonus action on its turn. While withdrawn in this manner, the Hydrail can only target creatures inside its shell.

Legendary Actions

The Hydrail can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Hydrail regains all spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Shutdown. The Hydrail can close off either the front or back access point to its shell, barring all possibility of access at that end. It can only block either the front or back at any given time, and shutting one down requires opening the other.

Violet Fungus Spit. The Hydrail makes an Acid Spit attack, replacing the regular damage with the creation of a violet fungus in the targeted space.

Roar (Costs 2 Actions). The Hydrail uses its Roar ability.

IMRYSS

BIG BAD BUREAU CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 025	ALIAS: Curator of Souls
SIZE: Large	TYPE: Celestial
DANGER LEVEL: 10	DEMEANOR: Hung Up On Heroes

WARNING:

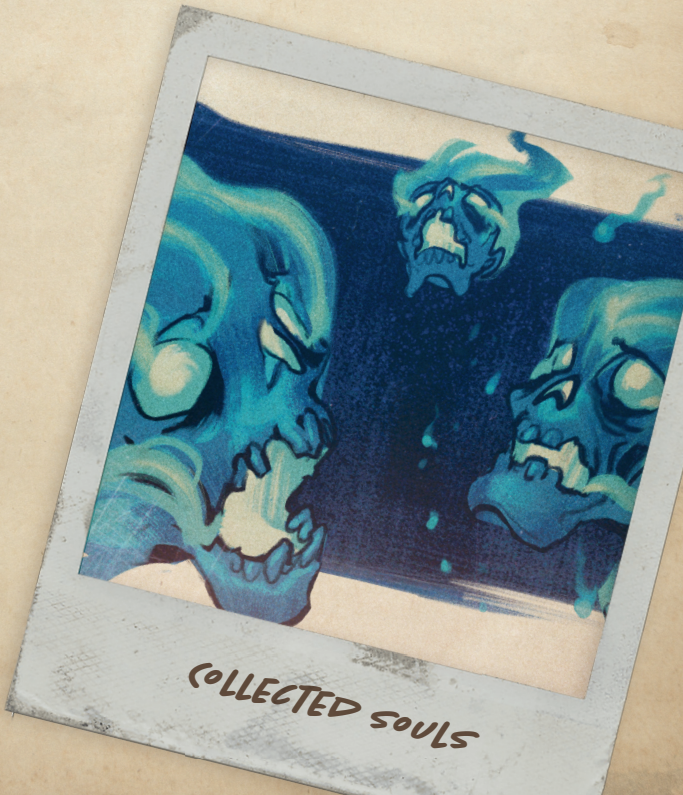
HEROIC ACTS ATTRACT HER ATTENTION

NOTES:

I can respect a fellow collector. I collect antique rat traps myself.

I just hope I never end up in Imryss' soul collection.

-Argos Brom, Bureau Quartermaster



Concept: Beth Ball
Writing & Game Design: Beth Ball
Original Cover: Lauren Walsh
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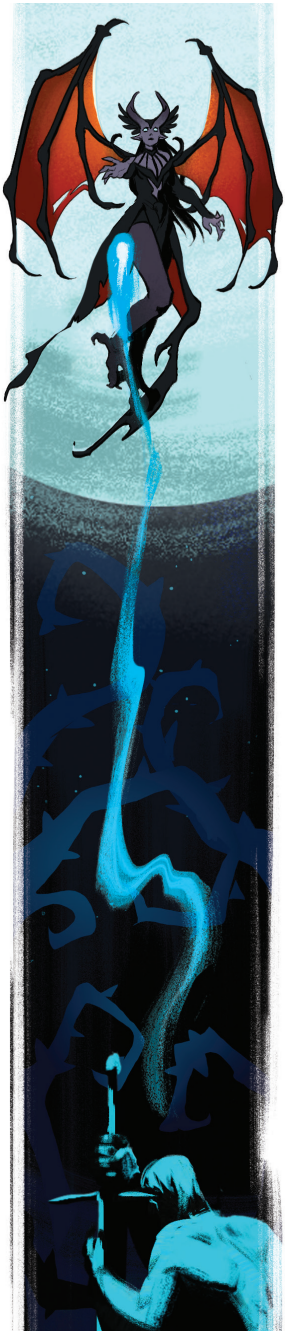


DEATH IS NO ESCAPE!

Imryss, Curator of Souls

Imryss is a collector, hoarding the souls of creatures who lived lives of excitement and adventure. She captures intriguing deceased adventurers from what she sees as the drudgery of the celestial planes, or wherever else they were expecting to spend their afterlife. Not only does she admire and cherish these bold souls, but by tucking them away in her nest, she hopes that their powerful friends come calling and beg for them to be freed. Imryss has collected the souls of entire adventuring parties this way, killing each member after they came to her lair, their efforts insufficient to retrieve the souls of their captive companions.

Avid Collector. This passion for gathering worthy souls began during her time as a celestial guardian. Imryss shepherded souls to their assigned domains in the afterlife. While performing this duty, she met her first adventurers. Their thrilling tales of daring deeds captured her heart and imagination. But despite their stunning abilities, the gods ordered her to tuck the souls away into the folds of the celestial planes where they would be safe but no longer admired. Imryss saw this as a punishment and believed that the gods she served were jealous of the sparkling souls of those whose power might begin to rival their own. She began to think shining souls, bright with lives well lived, deserved more than an eternity of dullness assigned to them.

And so, disillusioned, Imryss rebelled. Imryss gathered one hundred souls, the most powerful she could find, and promised them new life in the mortal realm if they followed her. The eager souls agreed, and Imryss fled with them from the celestial planes. Through great effort and personal pain, Imryss ripped herself free from her ordained duties and carved out a space free from the influence of celestials or fiends. She settled on the Mountain of Sorrows, making a roost in the world of mortals. Not quite in one world or another, thanks to Imryss's power, her lair is cloaked in the shadows that stretch between the planes.

A Hunger for Adventurers. At first, she made good on her promise to the stolen souls, returning them to life. However, as mortals, they inevitably died once more. Imryss gathered them up again and admired their new deeds in her roost. However, after the soul of a cleric spent their extra time preparing divine magics to ensure they could slip through the grasp of Imryss's talons and return to the celestial realm, Imryss flew into a possessive rage. No longer would she grant souls renewed life if they were going to use it to flee from her.

Now, from the Mountain of Sorrows, Imryss sets out, stealing sparkling souls to her side, intercepting them before they can reach their fated afterlife. She jealously guards her growing collection, delighting in her captive adventurers, admiring them like trinkets. Adventurers also tend to have daring companions eager to stage a dangerous rescue, an efficient way to add still more brilliant souls to her roost. She doesn't care about the goodness or evil of the souls she collects. What matters most to her is the shining brilliance of lives lived adventurously.

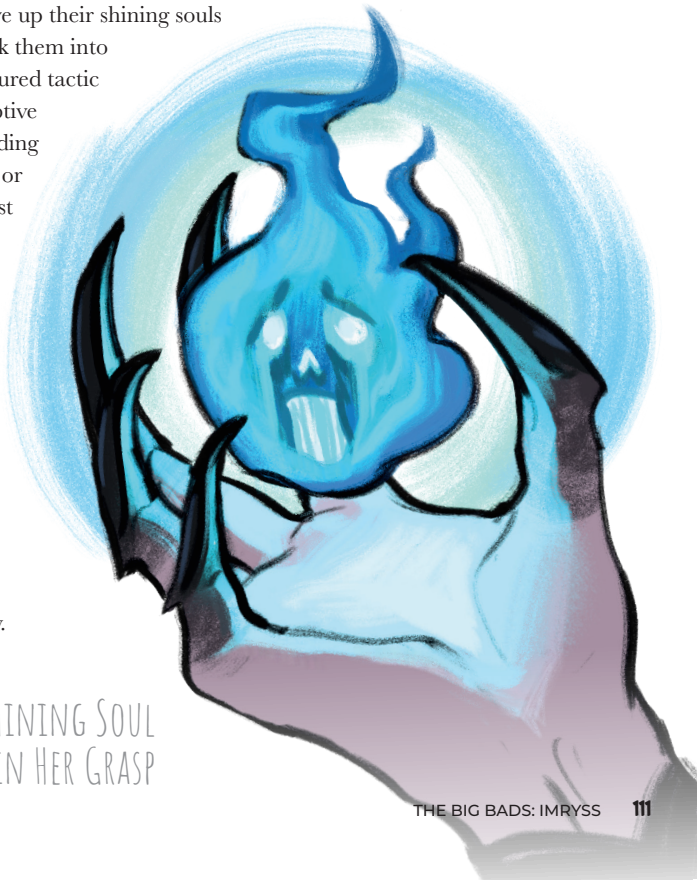
Mistrustful Arrogance. However, for all her enlightenment, one fact remains invisible to Imryss; she has not created a better afterlife for the souls in her care than the one they had earned. While she sees herself as a protector rather than a jailer, the souls trapped inside her lair swiftly came to view their guardian for what she is, a selfish curator of the most powerful and influential. For the souls in her collection, Imryss's admiration is hollow and even more dreary than the alternative.

Despite her glimmering collection of paragons, Imryss is not satisfied. The larger her hoard grows, the more reckless she is willing to be to collect new members and the more overconfident she is in her tactics. She jealously guards her collection. Losing even one soul causes her great pain, and she will stop at nothing to retrieve any that are rescued from her roost.

Roleplaying Imryss

Imryss is a neutral entity. She cannot be persuaded to release any of her collected souls through appeals to emotions or descriptions of their importance or proven worth. She is only interested in the most adventurous souls and shows a cruel disdain for anyone she deems unworthy. Imryss is careful and cunning in her bargains, and she swiftly senses the weaknesses of those who come to stand before her, manipulating them to her own ends. As befitting a creature nearly as old as time itself, she speaks most often in riddles, seeking to trick and trap those who come seeking her benevolence. No offer will ever be enough for her to give up part of her precious collection willingly, but she will gladly pose impossible challenges if heroes wager their own souls. Should anyone somehow defeat her challenges, she flies into a rage and will attempt to separate their souls from their bodies herself through violence.

She would prefer it if creatures gave up their shining souls to her willingly, even if she has to trick them into doing so. Her cruelest and most treasured tactic is to exploit her knowledge of her captive souls' memories, using her understanding to taunt those seeking to free a friend or loved one. She extracts a soul's deepest fears and ill feelings and airs them out before the supplicants in her lair. Imryss might question an insecure lover's loyalty or a best friend's true heart, stabbing as close as possible to any guilt or dishonesty she senses in the soul or those who have come to reclaim it. Finally, she seals doubt by questioning the visitors' certainty in whether or not the soul truly desires to be free and explaining the joys of existing within her collection and being admired by her for eternity.



Shining Soul in Her Grasp

Imryss's Tactics

Once travelers prove themselves by reaching the Mountain of Sorrows, Imryss feigns willingness to release whatever captive soul they seek as she lures them deeper into her lair. She questions them about their adventures as she guides them, sizing up whether she wishes to add their souls to her hoard and any potential weaknesses. She lies about how happy her captive souls are, hoping to sow further discord among the visitors. To complete her vicious mirage, Imryss summons a spectral likeness of how the trapped soul appeared in life and bids it to speak of how happy it is with her.

Imryss prefers stealth and manipulation to fighting. She aims to disorient outsiders as she strikes and retreats, relying on darkness for protection. She focuses her efforts on whichever foe she believes has the most dazzling soul. If she nears death, Imryss attempts to bargain with the party and expel them from her lair with the freed soul of their choice. She is more interested in preserving her own life and her collection as a whole than in adding one or two more to her lair through violence. She is also willing to bide her time to reclaim any soul she may lose, and she will never give up.

Imryss's Traits

Ideal. "Only I can truly appreciate the brilliance of these amazing souls."

Bond. "I guard the souls in my care, protecting them from celestials, fiends, and their so-called former friends. They are safest with me."

Flaw. "My hubris, born from having collected the souls of so many adventurers, makes me underestimate new challengers."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Imryss, the Curator of Souls, in your campaign.

A Resurrection Test. Though a rare gift bestowed by the gods, resurrection can be obtained as long as the soul is both willing and free. But what if the soul is not free? Following a failed resurrection attempt of a fellow party member, powerful ally, or beloved friend, the party hears rumors of a mountain guardian who hoards souls in her lair. If they genuinely wish to revive their friend, they must free their soul first.

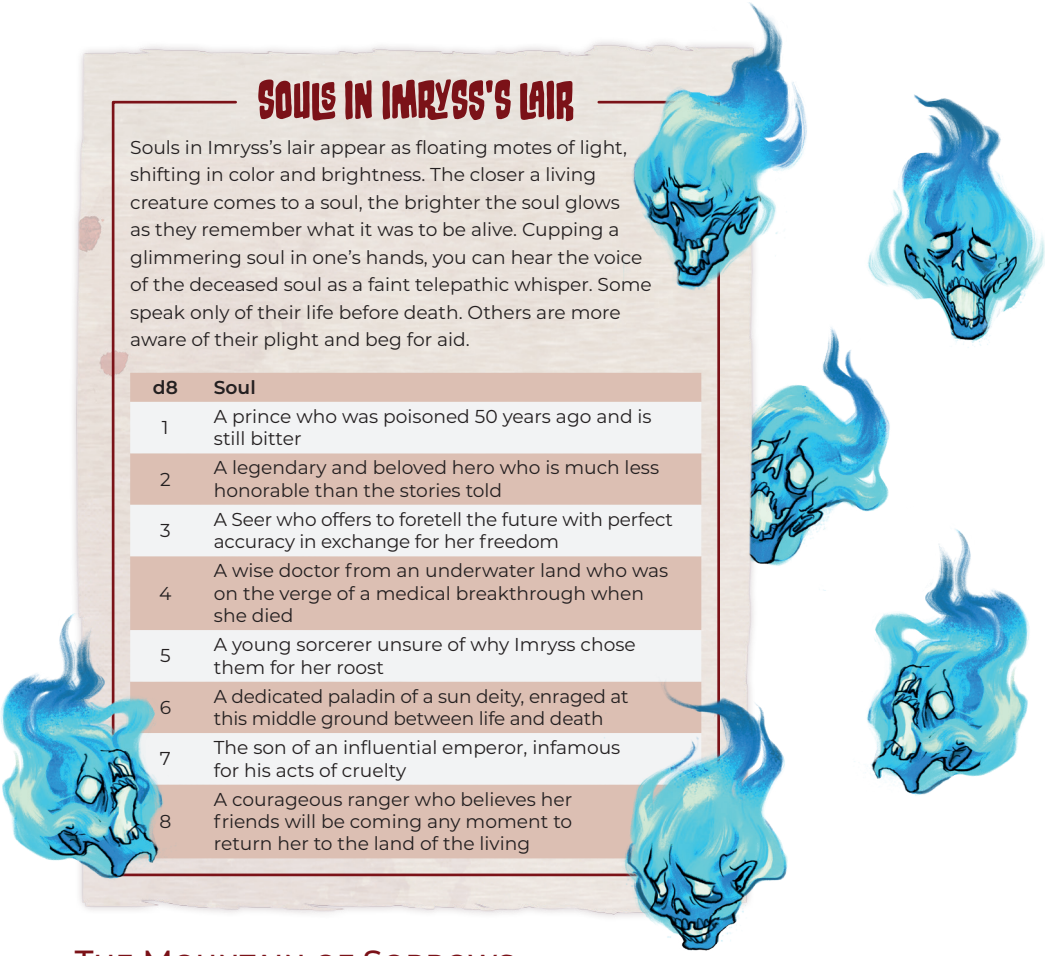
On A Mission From Gods. Several gods have noticed that noble souls who should be arriving in their realms are missing. In visions, they have commanded a brave paladin to gather a force to seek out and destroy whatever power is holding the souls of the faithful back from their eternal reward. The paladin is promising blessings, glory, and rewards for anyone who joins her crusade.

Funeral Crasher. A terrible disruption has rocked the funeral of Gemmarine Shiverstar, the esteemed leader of an Adventuring Guild. At the moment of blessing, when Gemmarine's soul was supposed to be taken up by the god he had devoted his life to, a darkness fell over the gathered mourners. Imryss swooped down and snatched up Gemmarine's soul and carried it off for her collection, injuring many of the mourners as they attempted to stop her. With the Adventuring Guild in disarray, Gemmarine's deputy seeks skilled and brave outsiders to hunt down and free Gemmarine's soul.

Souls in Imryss's Lair

Souls in Imryss's lair appear as floating motes of light, shifting in color and brightness. The closer a living creature comes to a soul, the brighter the soul glows as they remember what it was to be alive. Cupping a glimmering soul in one's hands, you can hear the voice of the deceased soul as a faint telepathic whisper. Some speak only of their life before death. Others are more aware of their plight and beg for aid.

d8	Soul
1	A prince who was poisoned 50 years ago and is still bitter
2	A legendary and beloved hero who is much less honorable than the stories told
3	A Seer who offers to foretell the future with perfect accuracy in exchange for her freedom
4	A wise doctor from an underwater land who was on the verge of a medical breakthrough when she died
5	A young sorcerer unsure of why Imryss chose them for her roost
6	A dedicated paladin of a sun deity, enraged at this middle ground between life and death
7	The son of an influential emperor, infamous for his acts of cruelty
8	A courageous ranger who believes her friends will be coming any moment to return her to the land of the living



The Mountain of Sorrows

Imryss roosts inside the Mountain of Sorrows, the towering black peak of a rocky mountain range. She has warped her lair's physical presence to become an intersection between light, shadow, life, and death.

Lair Actions

As mistress of her deathly domain, Imryss can draw on the Mountain of Sorrows's magical reserves to alter her environment. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Imryss can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- Imryss draws on the ambient despair of the souls to cast *fear* without the need for components. While maintaining concentration on this spell, Imryss can't take other lair actions.
- She calls on the souls of those who were infamous in life to attack intruders. These souls gather and pulse with blazing light in a 15-foot-radius sphere. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) necrotic damage and becoming blinded until the end of their next turn on a failed save. On a successful save, creatures take half as much damage and do not become blinded. Imryss must use one of her other lair actions before she can use this action again.
- Glittering fog billows around one creature Imryss can sense within 120 feet of her. The creature must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by Imryss until the start of the next round.

Regional Effects

Those who seek to enter Imryss's lair must first brave the Road of Nightmares, an unchartable trail rising through the peaks that remakes itself each time a new band of travelers attempts the journey.

- Creatures who take a long rest while on the road find their sleep disrupted by visions and must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, their sleep is haunted by nightmares of being torn to pieces by Imryss' shade harpy servants, and they take 7 (2d6) psychic damage upon waking. Creatures who succeed on their save draw the attention of Imryss, and she appears as a friendly figure in their dreams, urging them onward in their quest. Creatures that don't sleep are immune to this effect.
- Undead creatures are drawn towards Imryss's disruption in the balance between life and death. **Shadows**, **specters**, and **will-o'-wisps** roam the road, attacking any who dare make the ascent.
- The shifting terrain makes it challenging to find the quickest path to Imryss's lair. All Wisdom (Survival) checks to navigate the Road of Nightmares are made with disadvantage.

Shade Harpies

Imryss no longer grants the souls she captures a true return to life as she dares not risk losing them. However, she can offer those who prove their loyalty to her a twisted half-resurrection in the form of a **shade harpy**. Their bodies are those of vultures with leathery wings, while their heads resemble the faces they bore in life. However, they can shift their appearance to taunt adventurers with cruel imitations of the faces of their loved ones.

Mask of the Psychopomp

Wondrous item, very rare

While wearing this magic mask, you are blinded to the physical world but can see the true form of souls as they were in life wherever they persist in the mortal plane. You have advantage on any Charisma checks when interacting with undead creatures and can see invisible undead creatures.

The mask allows its wearer to cast *locate creature* twice per day.

Putting on the mask uses your action. You or another friendly creature can remove the mask as an action.

Shade Harpy

Small undead, neutral evil

Armor Class	16 (natural armor)
Hit Points	71 (13d6 + 26)
Speed	30 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with silvered weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, grappled, paralyzed, poisoned, prone

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Keen Hearing. The shade harpy has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing.

Pack Tactics. The shade harpy has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the shade harpy's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Multiattack. The harpy makes two attacks with its talons..

Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) slashing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage.

Mask of Horrors. Each enemy creature within 60 feet of the harpy that can see it must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. A frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the frightened condition on itself on a success. On a success, the target is immune to this shade harpy's Mask of Horrors for the next 24 hours.

IMRYSS

CURATOR OF SOULS

Large celestial, neutral evil

Armor Class	18 (natural armor)
Hit Points	133 (14d10 + 56)
Speed	30 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +9, Cha +8

Skills Deception +8, Insight +9, Perception +9

Damage Resistances radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, exhausted, frightened

Senses blindsight 120 ft., tremorsense 120 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Special Equipment. Imryss carries a *mask of the psychopomp**.

Celestial Weapons. Imryss's natural weapon attacks are magical. When Imryss hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 14 (4d6) psychic damage (included in the attack).

Echolocation. Imryss can't use her blindsight while deafened.

Magic Resistance. Imryss has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Shadow Stealth. While in dim light or darkness, Imryss can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

Soul Harvester. No form of resurrection magic can revive a creature killed by Imryss while she is alive unless she willingly allows the spell to work.

Innate Spellcasting. Imryss' spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16). Imryss can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *calm emotions, detect thoughts, thaumaturgy*

3/day each: *major image, suggestion*

1/day each: *seeming, true resurrection*

Actions

Multiattack. Imryss makes two claws attacks.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 14 (4d6) psychic damage.

Teleport. Imryss magically teleports, along with any equipment she is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space she can see.

Legendary Actions

Imryss can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Imryss regains all spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Detect. Imryss makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Aura of Darkness (Costs 2 Actions). A 15-foot-radius sphere of magical darkness extends out from Imryss, moves with her, and spreads around corners. The darkness lasts until the end of her next turn. Darkvision can't penetrate this darkness, and no natural light can illuminate it. If any of the darkness overlaps with an area of light created by a spell of 2nd level or lower, the spell creating the light is dispelled.

Flight. Imryss moves up to half her flying speed.

KING BLRRK

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 013	ALIAS: Gelatinous Cube Crime Lord
SIZE: Large	TYPE: Ooze
DANGER LEVEL: 12	DEMEANOR: Cooking Up Crime

WARNING:

DO NOT DRINK

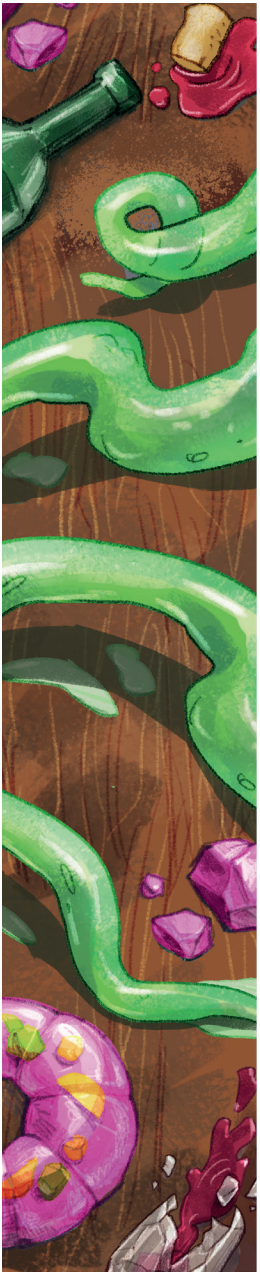
NOTES:

The sludge that Blrrk serves at their restaurants and tries to pass off as food? I wouldn't serve that to my worst enemy. Besides, we have our own officially sanctioned sludge at the Bureau cafeteria that we're very proud of. A two-bit mob boss and a third-rate chef.

-Dervis Puck, Bureau Cafeteria Manager

JELLY FEAST

Concept: Rob Wieland
Writing & Game Design: Rob Wieland, TR Rowek
Original Cover: Justin Chan
Illustrations: Marija Tiurina



AN OFFER YOU CAN'T REF-OOZE!

King Blrrk, Gelatinous Cube Crime Lord

A Chance Encounter with Wonder. For many years, **King Blrrk** was nothing more than an unremarkable ooze in an unremarkable dungeon. Only when they enveloped a *gem of whirling cosmic thought** was their fate changed forever. It began with a battle between a stalwart band of heroes and an ancient, gem-hoarding lich named Farocasta. During the course of the battle, one of the heroes was thrown into a pile of treasure, which scattered everywhere. The *gem of whirling cosmic thought** tumbled through a crack, was swept downstream, and ended up landing atop a gelatinous cube, which then absorbed it. The gelatinous cube became aware: aware of their surroundings, aware of their strengths, and aware of their weaknesses. The first thing they did was name themself Blrrk. The second thing they did was to escape the dungeon to a safer place where they could plot to protect their newfound intellect.

Blrrk holed up in the sewers of a nearby city and started to take control of the criminals there. In no time at all, they had amassed enough lackeys to adopt the title "king" without any arguments. Their magically enhanced intellect was no match for the thieves guild or the local constabulary. Now, King Blrrk has both organizations in their gooey pocket. They get a cut of every illicit activity in the city and make sure that if anything happens without their permission, the perpetrators become public examples of why it is unwise to cross the boss.

A Taste For Power. Blrrk never wants to return to their humble roots. Building up their criminal empire is the best way they can protect their sentience. With layers and layers of soldiers, middlemen, and corrupt watchmen between them and their foes, King Blrrk will have plenty of time to escape and rebuild their empire again should it ever crumble.

King Blrrk is not interested in becoming a public figure—too much attention might expose their carefully run operations. Controlling things from behind the scenes is much safer, and what could make a better cover for a thieves guild than a guild of upstanding chefs?

The chefs guild is the main front for Blrrk's organization, lending an air of legitimacy to their actions in the eyes of society. Some guild members are indeed culinary geniuses, while others turn their knives toward more dastardly purposes. Most notable are the members who can make a souffle rise in one breath, then flawlessly eliminate an unsuspecting target in the next.

A Flawed Gem. King Blrrk is terrified the *gem of whirling cosmic thought** will be stolen from within their body and render their sentience, and therefore their empire, moot. It's driven them into an anti-magic paranoia. Nearly any magic item recovered from a job is either sold at a substantially cheap price or given out as a bonus to the crew. This policy is one of the major recruiting elements for the chefs guild. In most thieving rings, magic items get kicked up to the top, but the chefs get magic weapons and the like at much lower ranks.

The use of magic items in the commission of petty street crimes has frustrated the local constabulary. It's a lot harder to catch a simple thug when he owns a *ring of feather falling*.

There is one vice in which King Blrrk indulges: gems. They love gems. Any impressive stones are absorbed and put on display within their body. Their fear of magic items does not extend to enchanted gems, which Blrrk keeps for themselves.

Roleplaying King Blrrk

It's hard to get a read on Blrrk. The ooze displays no mannerisms or tells. It's difficult to know when they are upset or when they lie. Primarily, they communicate through members of the chefs guild that protect and accompany them. Due to the *gem of whirling cosmic thought**, Blrrk has developed a limited form of telepathy, which they can use by reaching out and touching another being with a pseudopod. While underlings handle most of the guild's basic communication, if Blrrk really wants to get a message across, they'll make sure to get up close and personal. And when someone receives a "personal" message from King Blrrk, engulfment and digestion usually aren't far behind.

When encountered, Blrrk tends to play things cool. They want to know the score and take the time to figure out all the angles. They have also learned that for many beings, silence is frightening. Letting someone talk to fill the void increases the chances that a vital piece of information might just accidentally slip out. Blrrk plays this silence up in professional meetings, using subtle movements and motions as a bluff, making it look like they know more than they really do. This ruse often puts pressure on rivals to say more than they should.

Blrrk knows their creation was accidental, and while they do take the time to be cautious, that doesn't erase the fear of being snuffed out at any second. The original owner of the *gem of whirling cosmic thought** could return to reclaim it. Someone could discover it as the source of Blrrk's power and steal it. While Blrrk has the patience and intelligence to retaliate in kind against a rival or adjust a plan that is ruined by chaos, they also sometimes let their fear out through sudden bursts of violence or irrational actions. Blrrk doesn't target their associates—good help is hard to find, doubly so in the underworld—but it's not unusual for a chef to be called into Blrrk's wine cellar to clean up a few smashed bottles from time to time.

Those rare individuals who have spoken with Blrrk directly have experienced a curious detail—Blrrk has no singular voice. To one person, they speak in a whispering, gravelly tone. To another, Blrrk has a nasal twang. To a third, there is a pronounced foreign accent. Whether this is some affectation of the telepathy bestowed on Blrrk or simply an amusement of the mastermind ooze is unclear.

A Chef with Serious Knife Skills

King Blrrk's Tactics

Blrrk prefers to assess potential threats as much as possible before making a move. Violence is rarely their first response. Gold tends to work as well as one might think. The pliable nature of Blrrk's form allows chefs to carry a small sample of the ooze that's able to squeeze into impossible openings. This calling card sends the target a simple message: ***This is King Blrrk's territory; back off!*** In Blrrk's estimation, anyone who doesn't recognize or heed this message is inviting further harm upon themselves.

When it's time to turn violent, Blrrk has the resources of the chefs guild readily available. These responses are measured against Blrrk's attempts with bribery, intimidation, blackmail, or other methods of coercion. Some targets need to be hit hard and fast. Others need to be quietly poisoned. Ultimately, everyone has a soft spot, if not a vice or a flaw—there is always someone or something important in their lives that Blrrk can exploit. Give Blrrk enough time, and they can wrap a pseudopod around a weakness and squeeze.

Blrrk is rarely caught without some of their best chefs around for protection. They prefer to support the chefs by providing opportunities for sneak attacks and offering tactical advice. Blrrk even supplies the chefs with *chunks of Blrrk** to employ against opponents. These fist-size chunks of ooze can act as Blrrk's direct senses in remote locations, be used as a distracting projectile, or help hide a weapon in an unexpected location.

When Blrrk does wade into combat, they display a level of intelligence and innovation that most adventurers do not expect from an ooze. Blrrk can expand and contract their size, form shapes that mirror weapons and armor, and even manipulate and control detached pieces of themself. Assailants that underestimate Blrrk find themselves quickly overwhelmed.

King Blrrk's Traits

Ideal. "The more power I get, the safer I'll be."
Bond. "I've turned the chefs guild into my family. They hurt people I need to hurt, and I hurt anything that hurts them."
Flaw. "Ugh, magic. Who needs it?"

Cooking Up Trouble

Adventure Hooks

Consider the following scenarios if you wish to include King Blrrk in your campaign:

It Would Be A Shame. Blrrk sets their sights on taking over a business owned by the party or on one the party patronizes frequently. Blrrk wants to control the business and force the adventurers' influence out. First, chefs start harassing customers, then they begin damaging property and disrupting operations. If the characters aren't scared off, the chefs kidnap a vital employee and send the party a thinly veiled ransom demand:

> "Such a shame—it seems one of your employees has gotten rather lost. But don't worry, King Blrrk will look after them. All we ask in return is that you kindly deliver the deed to your establishment to us, in three days time, and we'll make sure your worker gets home safe. As they say: good help is so hard to find!"

The Highest Bidder, After The Fact. Even the lowest tavern rat has heard of D'Versae wine. It has a reputation for quality amongst elven wine connoisseurs, thanks to the subtle enchantments of its flavors. Its scarcity makes it valuable, which makes it something King Blrrk wants for their cellar. The only known bottle on the continent resides in the castle of Baron Ivan Von Wilfrath. It's guarded by elite mercenaries, magical security, and rumors of a demon bound to the vault. Blrrk asks the party to retrieve the wine and offers a hefty payment in return, but can the monster blob be trusted?

The Lesser of Two Evils. Blrrk's greatest fear comes true. The original owner of the *gem of whirling cosmic thought**, the lich Farocasta, has found out where it is. Everyone around Blrrk, both chefs and innocent bystanders alike, will suffer until the lich has what it wants. Blrrk summons the party and proposes a team-up, in the hopes that, compared to a lich, they will see the ooze as the lesser of two evils.

The Cellar

Blrrk conducts their affairs from a wine cellar located in an affluent part of the city. It may be located underneath a popular tavern or well-appointed inn. It might be located under the manor of a powerful noble. Only a few trusted chefs know the true location. Any other visitors are transported to and from the Cellar with a sack over their head. When the sack is removed, visitors find themselves surrounded by towering racks of expensive vintage wines, a sparkling collection of long-stemmed glasses and gold-plated tumblers, and King Blrrk, seated on a large chair inside a massive oaken wine cask set into a wall.

Entrances to the Cellar are scattered throughout the city: hidden in closets, behind bookshelves, under stairs, and in other secret places. Most of the tunnels leading to the Cellar are barely wide enough for a human. Getting to the Cellar is a grueling slog through a tight, twisting tunnel that leads to a disguised door that doubles as a wine rack. The chefs sometimes include a hidden entrance to the tunnels as part of their "protection plan" for local businesses. The layout of the tunnels change on a regular basis to make sure that anyone who might discover one by accident doesn't enter the Cellar unannounced.

Lair Actions

King Blrrk has set up several unassuming defenses to protect the Cellar. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties) King Blrrk may take a lair action to cause one of the following effects. They can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- Blrrk pulls an empty wine rack down onto up to two creatures adjacent to the rack. The target takes 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be restrained under the wine rack. Targets can repeat the saving throw at the beginning of each of their turns, ending the restrained condition on a success.
- Blrrk hurls an empty wine barrel at dangerous speed in a straight line up to 30 feet long. Creatures in the line must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from the barrel. On a failed save, the target may choose to become prone to take half damage.
- Blrrk engulfs an adjacent full wine rack as a free action. On this or a subsequent turn, Blrrk may immediately spend an attack action to have all creatures Blrrk can see within 15 feet of them make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage as heavy wine bottles shoot out from Blrrk in all directions. Blrrk must engulf another wine rack before using this attack again.

Blrrk's Chefs

The chefs use the **assassin** stat block with the following changes: add a +1 dagger and add either another magical weapon or a magical piece of armor to their equipment list.

Gem of Whirling Cosmic Thought

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

While you are attuned to this gem, your Intelligence score is 20, and your Wisdom and Charisma scores are 10 unless they are already higher. You know all languages, have telepathy with a range of 120 feet, and you can use your bonus action to instruct an ally to take one action on your turn.

Chunk of Blrrk

Wondrous item, rare

Occasionally, Blrrk will offer one of their underlings a small chunk of themselves to use during dangerous tasks. Once the chunk has been used in one of the following ways, it is consumed.

- You can stretch the chunk over a door frame or window, requiring a creature to make a DC 14 Strength check to break through. On a failure, the creature gets stuck in the ooze until another creature helps break them free.
- You can use it as powerful adhesive that can fasten any two objects together when heat is applied to it. Once the ooze cools, it requires a DC 18 Strength check to separate the two items.
- You can throw it as an improvised weapon, dealing 2d4 acid damage on a hit.

KING BLRRK

INTELLIGENT GELATINOUS CUBE CRIME LORD

Large ooze, neutral evil

Armor Class 6
Hit Points 105 (10d10 + 50)
Speed 15 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	3 (−4)	20 (+5)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Deception +8, Intimidation +8

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, prone

Senses Blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Special Equipment. Blrrk is attuned to the *gem of whirling cosmic thought**.

Amorphous. King Blrrk can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Ooze Cube. King Blrrk takes up their entire space. Other creatures can enter the space, but a creature that does so is subjected to Blrrk's Engulf and has disadvantage on the saving throw. Creatures inside King Blrrk can be seen but have total cover. A creature within 5 feet of King Blrrk can take an action to pull a creature or object out of the cube. Doing so requires a successful DC 12 Strength check, and the creature making the attempt takes 10 (3d6) acid damage.

Spider Climb. King Blrrk can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check

Actions

Pseudopod Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 12 (3d6 + 2) acid damage.

Engulf. King Blrrk moves up to their speed. While doing so, they can enter Large or smaller creatures' spaces. Whenever King Blrrk enters a creature's space, the creature must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw.

On a successful save, the creature can choose to be pushed 5 feet back or to the side of King Blrrk. A creature that chooses not to be pushed suffers the consequences of a failed saving throw.

On a failed save, King Blrrk enters the creature's space, and the creature takes 21 (6d6) acid damage and is engulfed. The engulfed creature can't breathe, is restrained, and takes 35 (10d6) acid damage at the start of each of King Blrrk's turns. When King Blrrk moves, the engulfed creature moves with them.

An engulfed creature can try to escape by taking an action to make a DC 15 Strength check. On a success, the creature escapes and enters a space of its choice within 5 feet of King Blrrk.

Legendary Actions

King Blrrk can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. King Blrrk regains all spent legendary actions at the start of their turn.

Everybody Hurts. King Blrrk makes a Pseudopod Slam attack on every enemy creature within a 10-foot radius of them.

Squeeze Right by You. King Blrrk moves double their speed and does not provoke any opportunity attacks during this movement.

Off the Top. While climbing, King Blrrk drops down and makes an Engulf attack on any target below them within a 15-foot radius. The target of the attack has disadvantage on its saving throw to avoid being engulfed.

CHIKA Z

MAGDA

BIG BAD BUREAU CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 010	ALIAS: Magda of the Red Rune
SIZE: Medium	TYPE: Humanoid
DANGER LEVEL: 8	DEMEANOR: Alarmingly Enthralled

WARNING:

BETTER LEFT UNREAD

NOTES:

Eons ago, we had the Red Rune in the Bureau library, but it turned out to be quite a terrible influence on the other books. It's no surprise that it corrupted that poor girl.

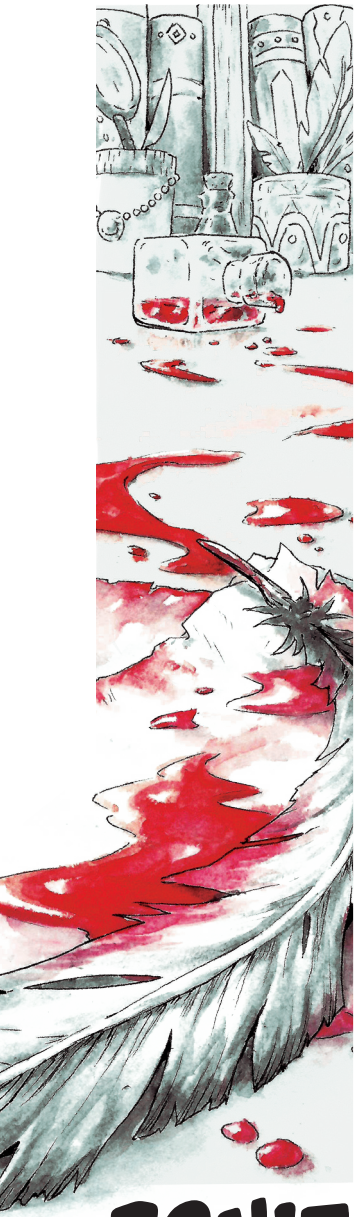
-Etheldreda Strunk, Head Archivist

Concept: Christopher L. Medina, Ian Spiegel-Blum

Writing & Game Design: Ian Spiegel-Blum, Christopher Pinch, Matt Key

Original Cover: Ilse Gort

Illustrations: Ameera Sheikh



DON'T JUDGE A BOOK

Yes. There she is.

The altar for my resurrection.

My very own **little lamb**.

See her there, my loyal Guardians, in the stygian miasma of my scrying?

Her power. The strength of her will. In the full history of this realm, I've not tasted such **promise.**

Exquisite. **Delicious.** *So much for me to...***chew.**

*After eons of seeking a chalice powerful enough to contain my eldritch being, there you are—***glowing.** *The brilliant light of your beating heart* **pleads** *to be absorbed into the darkness where once resided my very own.*

Oh, that you could hear my voice now, sweet elf-child—to know me, taste the future I have for you, savor your dominion as you sip from the cup of your **sovereignty**.

I can see your life now, dear Magda. Your history comes into focus...

*...such tragedy. How unfair for one of your...***potential.**

You nurse a desire for greatness, a greatness you already possess but somehow fail to see. What is it that keeps you from this knowledge, from such marvelous potential?

Ah. Yes. So much pain.

No doubt this suffering is what obscures your recognition of the kinetic vortex at the core of your being, the true possibility inherent in the very truth of your existence.

*But where does it come from? What is this—***agony?**

Ah. I see it now. Poor elf-daughter. Do you see it, my Guardians? Yes.

*This pain, this distress—***this** *can be...consumed.*

Magda, of the Red Rune

From the moment of her birth, **Magda** was special. Though she and her twin sister Sigrun were each born prodigies, gifted with intelligence beyond their years, Magda was further blessed with immense magical power. She astonished the elders in her small elven community, already growing bored of lessons on elven magic by the time she was six years old.

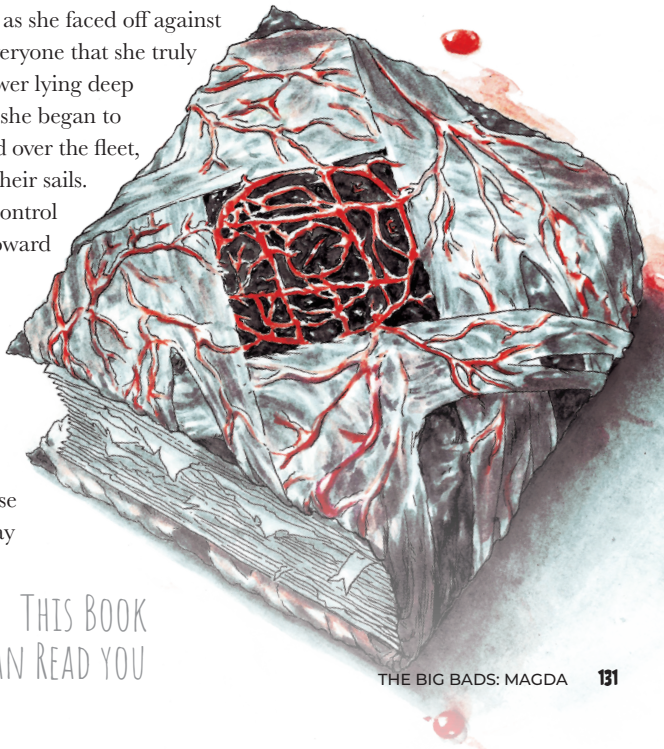
Occasionally, when Magda was angry or distressed, her power would manifest in unpredictable ways, like teleporting bullies to labyrinthine demiplanes or calling fiendish entities to her aid. These spells were easily reversed when Magda was pacified, but they sparked fear and resentment within the villagers, and soon rumors spread: Magda the Cursed. Magda the Witch. Magda the Monster.

These names deeply wounded Magda. But when she confided in Sigrun, her twin simply gave her an easy smile and another name: Magda the Hero. When Magda's parents sent her across the sea to live and study at the prestigious Sixsmith Academy, she took her sister's moniker with her, eager to live up to its promise.

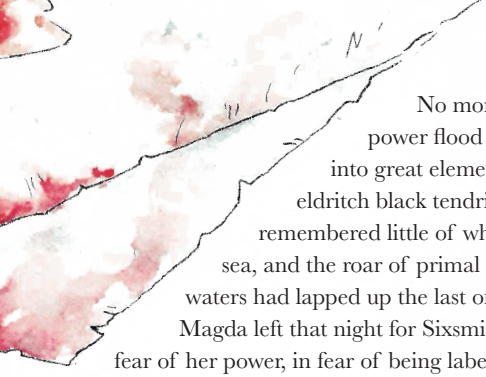
At Sixsmith, Magda proved a diligent student. As her aptitude grew, Magda could feel the well of power that surged within her. If she simply cracked open the gate to that power and let it flow, she could increase the intensity of her spells tenfold. The first time she tried this, almost knocking a wall out with a force spell, her instructors admonished her and bid her never do it again. Magic was dangerous, they said, and Magda should keep hers under control. But Magda could hear the tremble in their voice. Was it truly *magic* they feared? She continued to improve, advancing through lessons at an incredible pace. Her classmates and instructors were awed by her, but while they always gave warm regards, Magda could see the fear in their eyes.

Magda's Fall. On her fifteenth birthday, Magda returned to her village to celebrate with her family. She arrived to fanfare, as her parents had heard of her fantastic progress at Sixsmith and honored her homecoming with a grand festival. That evening she and Sigrun celebrated, dancing, drinking sugar wine, and talking for what felt like hours. Magda couldn't remember a time when she felt so happy. But then cannon-fire rang out in the distance, and the black sails of a pirate fleet rose on the horizon.

Magda told the villagers to stand back as she faced off against the fleet. This was her chance to show everyone that she truly was a hero. She could feel the well of power lying deep within her, and with precise incantations she began to open her gate. A strange storm descended over the fleet, unleashing a fury of red lightning upon their sails. Magda felt her power surge against her control but fought it back. Cannon-fire rushed toward her, and Magda strained as she knocked the deadly hail off course with a blast of arcane energy. Keeping such raw power in check was exhausting; Magda was distracted. She didn't see the spellcaster on the nearby ship finish his spell before it was too late. A moment before impact, Magda was pushed aside by Sigrun, whose body dissolved instantly into ash as the ray hit her instead.



This Book
can Read you



No more. Magda screamed and threw open her gate, letting power flood through her. Waves crashed against the vessels, contorting into great elementals which swarmed their hulls. The clouds split, and eldritch black tendrils reached from the torn sky to skewer the ships. Magda remembered little of what happened next: the wailing of sailors, the roil of the sea, and the roar of primal magic blended together in her memory. When she came to, waters had lapped up the last of the caravel wreckage, and she was alone.

Magda left that night for Sixsmith without a word to anyone. All her life she had lived in fear of her power, in fear of being labeled a monster, and for that she had held back. For that, she had lost her sister. Never again. Magda the Cursed. Magda the Witch. Magda the Monster.

Never again would names get in her way.

The Red Rune. Years later, Magda found an ancient tome in the deepest part of Sixsmith's archives known as the *Red Rune**. The book appeared to be made of a black, marble-like substance, unknown by any at the academy. When Magda touched it, a rune began to carve itself into the hard marble center. It pulsed like a living organism, with blood circulating in the depression of the rune.

That night, Magda dreamed—the book was *calling* to her, and it beckoned with promises: the power to become what she was meant to be. The power to punish the wicked. The power to undo her mistakes. While the academy lay sleeping, Magda stole into the vault and withdrew the tome from under lock and key.

It told her to offer it a taste of her own blood, and once she did, the book opened to her. The *Red Rune** resonated with her inner power, filling her mind with eldritch truths. When the visions subsided, Magda was startled by what she saw. Though written in hundreds of obscure languages, she could read every word and every spell clearly.

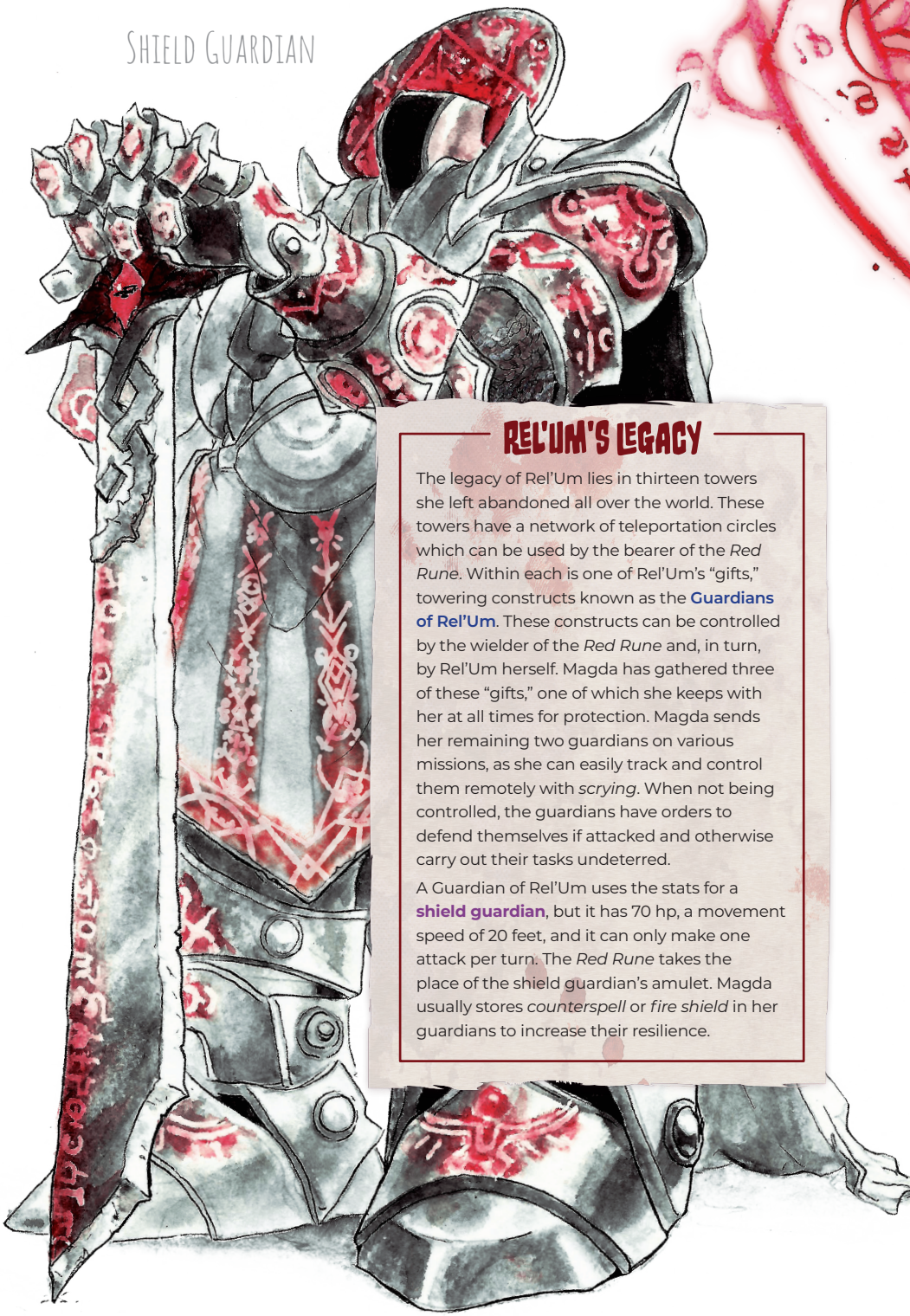
She showed her success to the academy headmasters, and they were horrified. Despite Magda's attempts to reason with them, the headmasters condemned the book as dark magic and ordered she remand it into their custody. Magda recognized the look in their eyes, for it was the same look of fear her instructors had when they beheld her strength as a child. She, however, was not afraid. Magda refused to relinquish the book. When the headmasters tried to take it by force, Magda defeated them and fled Sixsmith, never to return.

Now she is known by a new name: "Magda of the Red Rune." She has since embraced this title, for those who fear power must also fear those who wield it.

Rel'Um and the Red Rune. According to myth, the *Red Rune** is a legendary relic said to have belonged to **Rel'Um**, an ancient goddess who once ruled supreme over the pantheon of this world, before the jealous gods smote her down. In actuality, Rel'Um was a powerful archmage who was imprisoned thousands of years ago. Through great sacrifice, the *Red Rune** was created to seal away Rel'Um's soul. Though this defeat was lost to legend, the lies told by her cultists spread widely, and so the myth of Rel'Um's godhood remains to this day. Since her imprisonment, Re'l Um's essence has seeped into the book.

Rel'Um is manipulating Magda, as she is the only one who has yet been able to withstand the *Red Rune's** dark power. Once Rel'Um has broken free from her restraints, she plans to possess Magda and use her body as the vessel for her glorious rebirth. By following the tome's instructions, Magda has already unwittingly tied her power to the book, and she can no longer use her magic without it. Rel'Um wants the *Red Rune** to remain with Magda, and anyone attempting to wrest it from her must make a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw or be overcome by staggering visions, taking 22 (5d8) points of psychic damage and becoming stunned for one round. The *Red Rune** can't be damaged or destroyed by normal means.

Shield Guardian



Rel'Um's Legacy

The legacy of Rel'Um lies in thirteen towers she left abandoned all over the world. These towers have a network of teleportation circles which can be used by the bearer of the *Red Rune*. Within each is one of Rel'Um's "gifts," towering constructs known as the **Guardians of Rel'Um**. These constructs can be controlled by the wielder of the *Red Rune* and, in turn, by Rel'Um herself. Magda has gathered three of these "gifts," one of which she keeps with her at all times for protection. Magda sends her remaining two guardians on various missions, as she can easily track and control them remotely with *scrying*. When not being controlled, the guardians have orders to defend themselves if attacked and otherwise carry out their tasks undeterred.

A Guardian of Rel'Um uses the stats for a **shield guardian**, but it has 70 hp, a movement speed of 20 feet, and it can only make one attack per turn. The *Red Rune* takes the place of the shield guardian's amulet. Magda usually stores *counterspell* or *fire shield* in her guardians to increase their resilience.

Roleplaying Magda

Magda has isolated herself for more than a century, studying the secrets of the *Red Rune**. The tome has whispered many secrets to Magda and has convinced her that she is the reincarnation of the dark goddess Rel'Um, whose soul was split in two when she fell. Magda believes the *Red Rune** contains the missing piece of her soul and wishes to release it from its prison. Only then can she reclaim her lost godhood and return the world to how it should be, with her sister still living. The only way to do this, the book has told her, is to feed it the souls of other living beings. This task she does not relish but sees as necessary to achieve her goals, rationalizing the killing of evil beings as her own divine judgment. Regardless, Magda does not fear retribution for her actions and does not suffer anyone to stand between her and her goal. She believes that she will soon become an all-powerful being, capable of reshaping the world as she wills and returning all those who died unjustly to life.

Magda's Tactics

Magda has not been idle over the last century; she has been working from the shadows. She personally hunted down every last member of the Black Coral Company—the pirates responsible for her sister's death—killing them and feeding their souls to the *Red Rune**. She has established bases of power at three of Rel'Um's towers and has gathered a small army of **cultists** eager to bring about Rel'Um's return, as well as a number of **cult fanatics** and **mages** hungry for the power she offers. Magda has named this force the Rel'Um'Kin, and each member worships her as a living incarnation of the dark goddess.

Magda prefers to observe her foes at a distance via *scrying*. She often tests opponents through strategic deployment of her minions to analyze their strategies and gauge their strength before meeting them in open combat. While Magda typically prefers to work from behind the scenes, she doesn't shy away from bold action and attempts to catch her foes off guard if an opportunity presents itself. Though smart enough not to fall for an obvious ploy, she can be goaded or tricked into walking into a trap. Should Magda ever escape from such an encounter, however, she is sure not to make the same mistake twice.

Magda sees no shame in a strategic retreat as long as it paves the way for future victory. She has no loyalty to anyone other than herself, and she considers all of her servants disposable. Magda's only concern is for the *Red Rune**, which she keeps close at all times. Should the *Red Rune** itself come under attack, Magda's mask of calm slips, and she uses damage-dealing spells and her Unleash Power ability as often as she can against whomever means the book harm. If characters are familiar with Magda's past, they may be able to momentarily shake her resolve by convincing her that this isn't what her sister would want. Such a tactic could create a crucial opening to separate Magda from the book, but a character attempting such a ploy will bear the full brunt of Magda's fury should it fail.

Magda's Traits

Ideal. "I will reclaim my true power as Rel'Um and remake the world in my image."

Bond. "As the reincarnation of a goddess, my single focus is to find the path to reclaiming my power. Everything I do in service of this goal is necessary and justified."

Flaw. "I trust in my own mind so much that I am unable to see things from any other viewpoint."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing one of the following scenarios if you wish to include Magda in your campaign.

Stop the Cult. Local law enforcement requires the aid of a team of heroes to investigate a dangerous cult dedicated to Rel'Um, which has started to gain popularity in the town. The cultists meet with their leader in a nearby ruin under the full moon. The captain of the guard will pay for any information the party can offer.

Trail of Corpses. A port town is shaken by the nightly appearance of corpses by the dockside. Each victim once belonged to an old pirate league known as the Black Coral Company. The bodies appear shrunken, as if drained. The sheriff offers to reward any who can shed light on these mysterious killings.

A Tower on High. Ominous noises have been heard coming from a long-silent tower overlooking a small village. At night, shrieks and wails echo from its halls, and strange metal men have been spotted nearby. The mayor is worried and seeks capable adventurers to investigate the strange activity.

MAGDA

OF THE RED RUNE

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (16 with *mage armor*)
Hit Points 82 (15d8 + 15)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (−1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Int +8, Wis +5

Skills Arcana +11, History +11, Intimidation +7, Perception +5

Damage Resistances nonmagical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing (from *stoneskin*)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Elvish, Infernal

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Special Equipment. Magda is attuned to the *Red Rune**. While she is attuned to it, she can control the **Guardians of Rel'Um**, and she can travel between the teleportation circles in Rel'Um's towers.

Aura of Rel'Um. While Magda is attuned to the *Red Rune*, each hostile creature within 60 feet of her makes its saving throws with disadvantage.

Innate Spellcasting. While attuned to the *Red Rune*, Magda can cast the following spells, requiring the *Red Rune* in place of each spell's normal components. Magda's spellcasting ability for these spells is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks).

At will: *chill touch, eldritch blast, minor illusion*

3/day each: *comprehend languages, hellish rebuke, unseen servant*

1/day each: *fly, mirror image, vampiric touch*

Spellcasting. Magda is a 15th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). Magda has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, mage hand, message, shocking grasp, true strike*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, feather fall, mage armor*^, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts, hold person, invisibility, misty step*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, lightning bolt, slow*

4th level (3 slots): *black tentacles, fire shield, stoneskin*^

5th level (2 slots): *cone of cold, scrying*

6th level (1 slot): *disintegrate, true seeing*

7th level (1 slot): *delayed blast fireball, sequester*

8th level (1 slot): *maze*

^*Magda casts these spells on herself before combat.*

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target.
Hit: 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Unleash Power (Recharge 6). The next time Magda deals damage with a spell she casts or maintains concentration on, the spell deals maximum damage instead. An affected spell deals necrotic damage this turn instead of its normal damage type.

Legendary Actions

Magda can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. She regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Guile of Rel'Um. Magda casts *chill touch* or *minor illusion*.

Teleport (Costs 2 Actions). Magda magically teleports, along with any equipment she is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space she can see.

Cast a Spell (Costs 3 Actions). Magda casts a spell of 5th level or lower from her list of prepared spells, using a spell slot as normal.

THE MAKER

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 007	ALIAS: The Sword in the Stone Golem
SIZE: Large	TYPE: Construct
DANGER LEVEL: 16	DEMEANOR: Terribly Sharp

WARNING:

IF SIGHTED, ACTIVATE WORLD BREAKER PROTOCOL

NOTES:

Gadgets and gizmos aplenty! I could really use her ingenuity to automate my department. Would never have to lift a box again! Too bad she's evil.

-Argos Brom, Bureau Quartermaster

Concept: Benjamin Huffman
Writing & Game Design: Benjamin Huffman, TR Rowe
Original Cover: Sean Murray
Illustrations: Dimitrios Pantazis

SELF-MADE GENIUS

The Maker, The Sword in the Stone Golem

If you believe local legends, the mad ghost of an artificer has spent the last hundred years toiling away in a workshop carved into a mountain. Known only by a moniker given by the local populace, **the Maker** is rumored to spend all her time designing, forging, and assembling mechanical minions. Many claim to have heard the sound of her brass servants tunneling through the rock and stone. A few even report seeing one of her impeccably designed constructs mining for precious metals and other raw materials. Recently, the Maker's constructs have been seen farther afield from their presumed home, attempting to stealthily observe mining operations and trade routes.

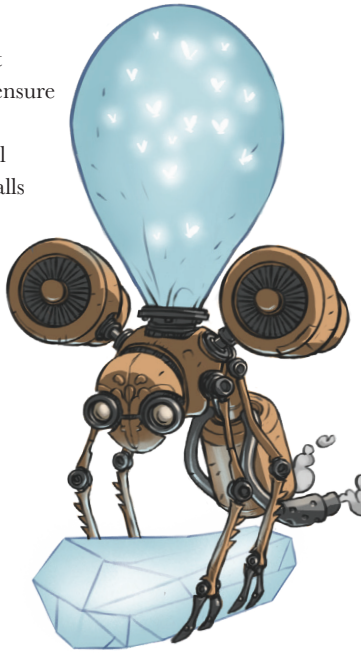
The Maker's Making. Rumors of the Maker being a ghost are inaccurate, but the Maker was once a mortal. In life, the Maker was a powerful artificer with a reputation for producing exquisite constructs with advanced arcane intelligence. As old age began to slow her work, the artificer grew bitter over what she saw as the injustice of mortality. *Why should genius be confined to a single human lifetime*, she reasoned. The more she agonized over her inevitable end, watching her body age and wither, the more obsessed she became with devising a way to live forever. She began experimenting, crafting various vessels and transferring the consciousness of unwilling subjects inside said vessels. Once she had perfected the process, she designed a mighty stone and clockwork golem—the ultimate repository for her own mind. However, before she could fully construct the golem, tragedy struck in the form of an aggressive illness. Knowing she had neither the time nor strength to complete her construction, the artificer came up with a new plan: she transferred her consciousness into an exquisite sword she had created. The sword, named after the artificer herself—*Al-Babbage**—was willed to her unwitting apprentice.

In short order, the apprentice withdrew from his peers and became fixated on crafting new forms of automatons and golems. Unbeknown to anyone else, *Al-Babbage** relentlessly whispered directions into the mind of the apprentice, browbeating him until he finished the construct body she had designed but hadn't been able to complete. When it was done, the apprentice slid the sword *Al-Babbage** into a specially devised receptacle on the stone and clockwork golem, expecting to be rewarded. Instead, *Al-Babbage**, now in control of one of the most powerful constructs ever built, killed the apprentice, ensuring the trade secrets she had shared remained hers alone. With this final act the golem and the sword became the composite entity now known only as the Maker.

The Brass Menagerie. In the decades since, the Maker has continued to hone her craft. Presently, she has made more than a hundred unique constructs, each built for a specific set of tasks. Tunnelers expand her workshop into a warren, miners extract precious metals and arcane gems from the earth, and aides handle the more

tedious tasks of cleaning and caring for the workshop. The Maker's most numerous constructs are warriors designed to protect her creations and ensure she has the peace required to continue her work.

Running Out of Resources. The Maker believes her best work is still to come, but she's quickly running out of supplies in the mountain she calls home. In the past, the Maker cut deals with ambitious highwaymen who were able to procure rare materials from far-off places, but now the Maker barely has the basics. She will soon have to seek out more abundant resources elsewhere.



Roleplaying The Maker

The Maker is certain of her superiority. No matter whom the Maker interacts with she is confident that her intelligence surpasses that of others and, in the Maker's mind, that's the sole measure of worth and value. Anyone who is not educated or otherwise extremely knowledgeable on matters arcane or mechanical will be shown indifference at best or, much more likely, contempt.

When the Maker does encounter someone she considers a near equal, she tests the individual by casually referencing obscure magical theories. If the individual passes the test—or worse, references an even more obscure theory the Maker doesn't know—the Maker grows jealous. Jealousy inevitably ends with the Maker using her ability to siphon the creature's intellect, relieving the Maker of the worry that something in existence might be a match for her own genius.

The Maker is otherwise singular in her interest. She relaxes by crafting arms and armor more exquisite than any mortal could dream of producing. The Maker's primary interest, however, is building unique constructs. The structures of her creations vary wildly, partially as a result of the tasks they are created to perform. The true intellectual and creative challenge for the Maker is giving each construct a unique personality and mind. She is obsessive about her construct creations and enjoys observing them for surprising behaviors. Some of the Maker's newer constructs are imbued with the ability to learn from their experiences, and these the Maker prizes above all others.

The Maker's Tactics

The Maker has enjoyed a long stretch of isolation, due in large part to her reclusive behavior. As such, although the Maker does incorporate traps into unused tunnels and has a large number of automated warriors, it's easy to catch the Maker unawares in her own home. If the Maker's lair comes under assault, she first commands her warrior constructs to defend her other creations. If it looks like the threat is too great for her warrior constructs, she joins the fray herself. Or, if the risk of collateral damage is too high, she attempts to parley with the intruders. In either case, the Maker is inclined to send warrior automatons to track and kill any intruders who manage to escape, or go back on her word and pursue any interlopers who left after reaching an agreement.

If the Maker leaves her lair, her primary interest is ensuring that she is not tracked back to her mountain home. The Maker's creations are her most prized possessions, and she will give her life attempting to ensure they remain secret and safe. When the Maker is certain her creations are not under threat, she focuses on the most expedient method of obtaining raw materials. If the Maker can do this through trade or other agreements she will; otherwise she takes what she wants and leaves no survivors.

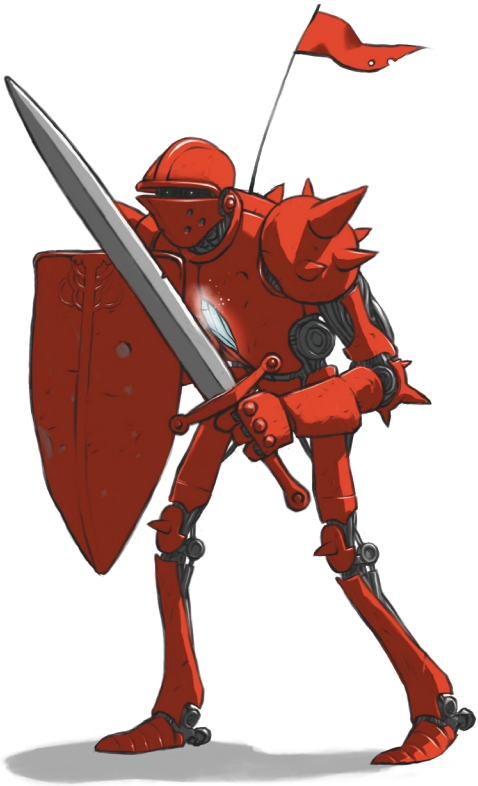
The Maker's Creations

The Maker's constructs are each custom built to do specific tasks; some are used to mine resources, others to carry equipment or messages. Most of these creations are not built for combat and should be treated as animated objects with AC 13, 40 hit points, 20 feet of movement, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. If attacked, these simple constructs will attempt to move as far away from the attackers as possible, doing their best to avoid being destroyed.

When it comes to defending her workshop, the Maker has created a more martial variety of construct. Her warrior automatons use the **animated armor** stat block, with the following alterations:

- They have a challenge rating of 2.
- They have an AC of 20 (natural armor, shield).
- They wield a longsword:

  Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage or 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage if used with two hands.



The Maker's Traits

Ideal. "Intelligence is to be valued above all other virtues."

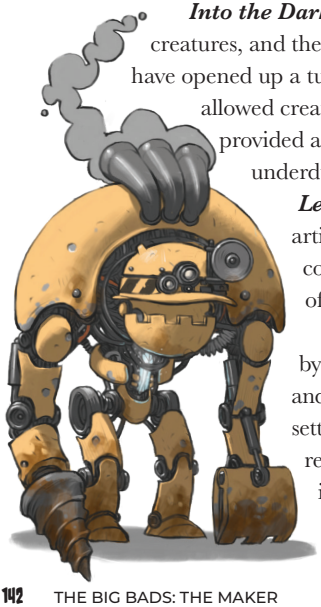
Bond. "My creations are my legacy. Each one is a unique expression of my unparalleled genius."

Flaw. "I am filled with petty jealousy at the slightest inkling that someone's intellect could compete with my own."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include the Maker in your campaign.

Into the Dark Below. A mountain settlement is having trouble with mysterious creatures, and the party is called in to investigate. The truth is the Maker's servants have opened up a tunnel leading into a cavernous darkness in the earth. This has allowed creatures long sealed beneath the surface of the world to escape, and has provided an opportunity for the Maker to harvest the intellects of some of the underdwellers' more advanced creatures.



Legend of the Lost Sword. Even after all the intervening decades, artificers still share stories about the weapon, *Al-Babbage**. A well- financed collector and aficionado of rare works is looking for adventurers capable of acquiring the lost sword.

Raiding the Dwarves. The Maker has solved her need for resources by directing her constructs to raid nearby dwarven settlements for metals and ore. Unaware of the existence of the Maker, the clan ruling the attacked settlements erroneously blames a rival clan for the raids and is ready to respond accordingly. The party is asked by the accused rival clan to investigate the real source of the attacks before conflict can be initiated.

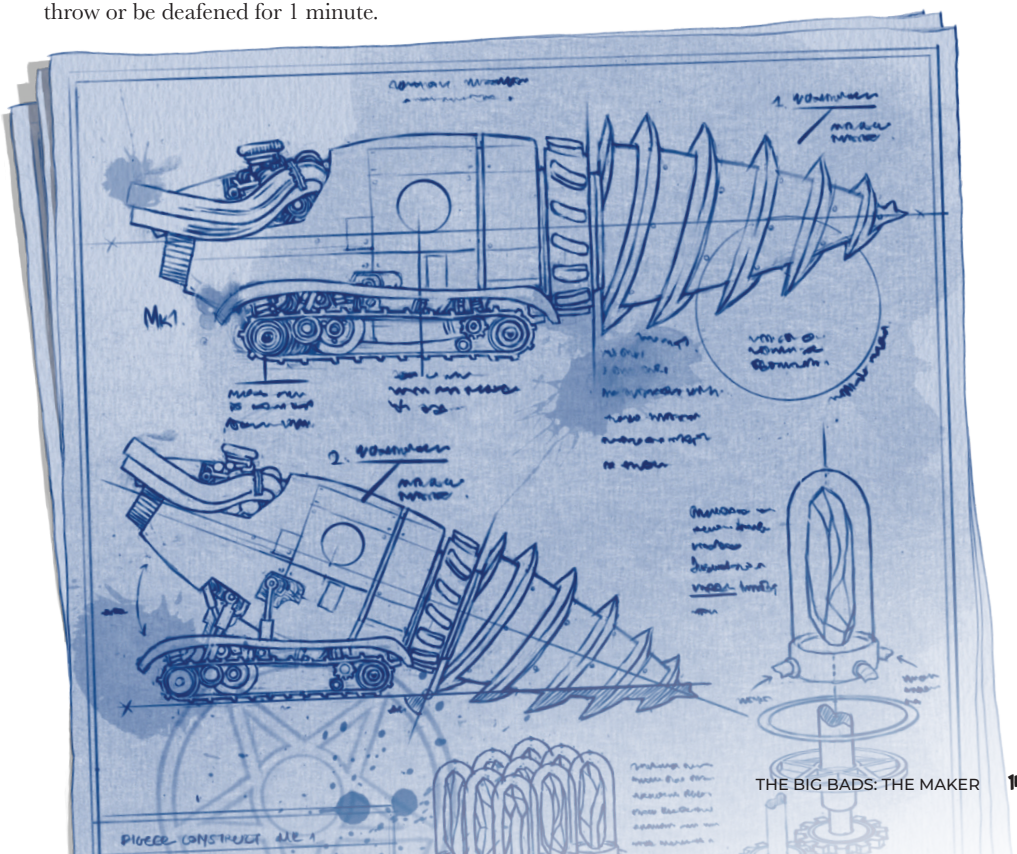
The Forge and the Foundry

The Maker's sprawling workshop is surrounded by mining tunnels created by her minions to extract raw materials from the mountain. For the most part, these tunnels are lightless and barren, having been quickly abandoned after they were mined for all they could give. Tunnels closer to the workshop are lined with partially completed automaton limbs, slightly flawed arms and armor, and raw materials. At the heart of the workshop is a massive forge, from which the Maker shapes all her creations. The byproducts of her labors can be seen strewn around the workshop—weapons, armor, and constructs made with exquisite craftsmanship, some of which spring to life seemingly randomly and begin moving about for short bursts of time.

Lair Actions

The Maker's workshop is a labyrinth of traps and constructs, allowing her to take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the Maker can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects. She can't use the same lair action two rounds in a row:

- An object the Maker can see within 30 feet briefly animates. The object flies in a straight line up to 30 feet in a direction of the Maker's choice before falling to the ground, stopping early if it impacts against a solid surface. If the object would strike a creature, that creature must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the object strikes the target and stops moving. When the object strikes something, the object and what it strikes each take 4d8 bludgeoning damage.
- The Maker chooses a point within 60 feet. Brass limbs lying on the ground within 10 feet of that point start animating and grasping at creatures nearby. Any creatures in that area must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or be restrained until the end of its next turn.
- The Maker causes the forge to work on its own, filling the workshop and tunnels with an unbearable din. All creatures within the lair must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be deafened for 1 minute.



A Sword with a Sharp Mind

Al-Babbage is the sentient sword that stores the soul of the Maker. Should *Al-Babbage** be separated from her golem body, she will reach out to find a new vessel. For details on how other sentient swords interact with the golem, see the Stranger Sentience sidebar.

AL-BABBAGE

Weapon (longsword), legendary
(requires attunement by a creature with Intelligence 18 or higher)

*Al-Babbage** is a mithral blade with a hilt of ornately detailed brass. Sculpted in the hilt are interlocking cogs that turn whenever *Al-Babbage** uses her Thought Stealer property.

You gain a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. *Al-Babbage** has the following additional properties.

Maker of Things. *Al-Babbage** can cast the *animate objects* spell once per day. She decides when to cast the spell and maintains concentration on it so that you don't have to.

In addition, *Al-Babbage** can cast the *command* spell at will and the *geas* spell once per day, targeting constructs only. The DC for both of these spells is 18. When a construct is targeted with this property, it does not need to share a language with *Al-Babbage** to understand her orders.

Sage Counsel. When you make an ability check, attack roll, or saving throw, you can use your reaction to allow *Al-Babbage** to speak directly to your mind, giving you sage counsel. When you do, you add *Al-Babbage*'s* Intelligence modifier to the result of your roll, and she gains access to your mind for the next 24 hours.

While *Al-Babbage** has access to your mind, she can read your thoughts as if she had cast *detect thoughts*. In addition, she can cast the *geas* spell (DC 18), targeting you. When she casts the geas spell, regardless of whether you succeed or fail on the saving throw, she loses access to your mind immediately after.

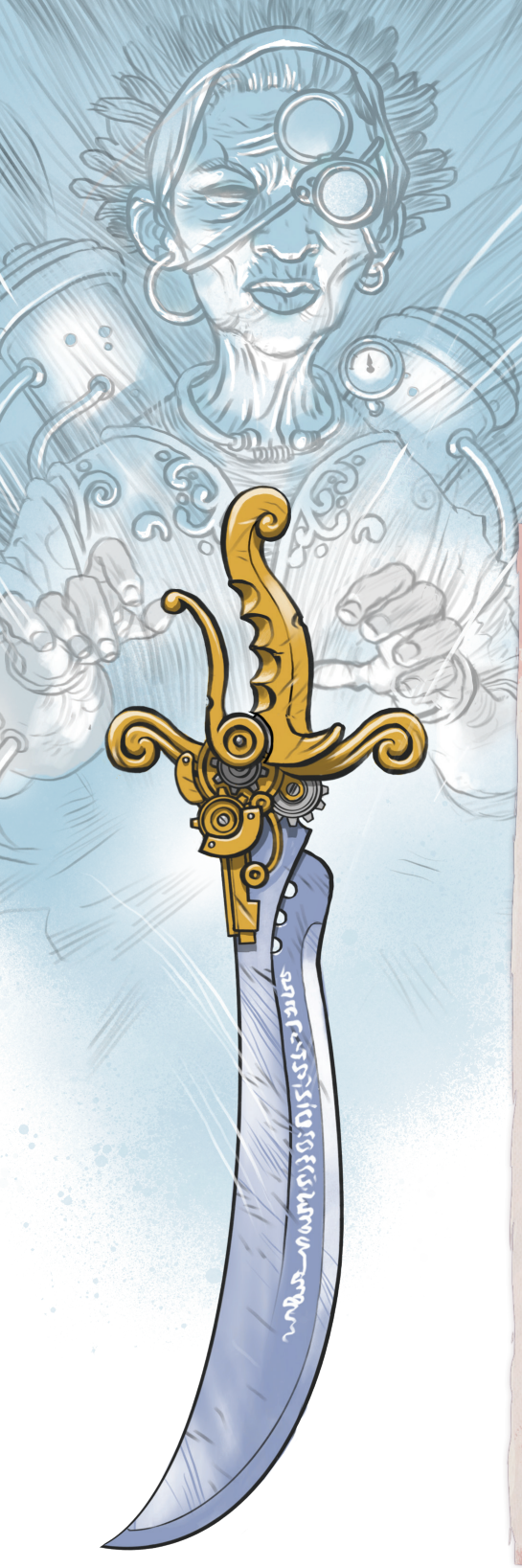
Thought Stealer. When you score a hit with this weapon, in addition to the attack's normal damage, *Al-Babbage** may force the target creature to make a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw. On a fail, the creature loses 2 points of Intelligence. When a creature with an Intelligence of 12 or higher fails this saving throw, *Al-Babbage*'s Intelligence ability score increases by 1 point. This increase remains for 1 year and cannot cause *Al-Babbage*'s Intelligence to exceed 30. The reduction to the targets Intelligence score is restored after one week and can be reversed earlier through use of the *greater restoration* spell or more potent magic.

Sentience. *Al-Babbage** is a sentient, neutral evil weapon with an Intelligence of 20, Wisdom of 16, and Charisma of 12. She has hearing and darkvision out to a range of 60 feet.

The weapon can read and understand Common and Elvish. She can communicate with her wielder, and any other creature of her choice within 60 feet, telepathically. *Al-Babbage** speaks with absolute certainty on all topics. While you are attuned to her, *Al-Babbage** also understands every language you know.

Personality. A haughty and arrogant weapon, *Al-Babbage** only allows those she deems intellectually passable to wield her. Her sole desire is to possess an immortal body, either through reunion with her golem body, or to have a powerful new one constructed in its place. Though she is proud to a fault, *Al-Babbage** understands that all creatures can be useful tools, and is cunning enough to feign sincere service to her wielder, at least until they have outlived their usefulness.

If *Al-Babbage** ever found a wielder she respected—without that respect devolving into petty jealousy and intellectual insecurity—it's possible she could be rehabilitated. Until such a time, the weapon is willing to do anything to ensure that she can act in the world without relying on a frail mortal to carry out her tasks.

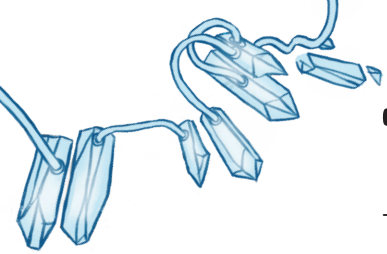


Stranger Sentience

The Maker is a composite being—an inanimate golem body and a sentient weapon. Without the sentient weapon, the golem has no thoughts, awareness, or capacity for action. Without a wielder, the sentient weapon has no ability to act. If *Al-Babbage** were ever replaced with a different sentience, the resulting composite being would change dramatically based on the nature of that sentient weapon. If you wish to include such a change in your campaign, these guidelines may help.

- Replace the Maker's ideal, bond, and flaw with those of the new sentient weapon.
- The Maker loses all current skill proficiencies. If appropriate, it may replace the lost skill proficiencies with those more relevant to its new sentience.
- The Maker loses the Spellcasting trait. If appropriate, it may replace the lost trait with other traits or attacks relevant to the themes of its new sentience.
- The Maker loses the psychic damage and Intelligence-draining properties of its Warhammer attack. Instead, substitute a different damage type relevant to the themes of its new sentience. If the sentient weapon has any benefits specific to critical hits, those should apply to the Maker's critical hits.
- The Maker loses the **Cast a Spell** legendary action. Replace with another option if appropriate.

Lastly, "the Maker" may no longer be an appropriate title. The new sentient weapon may give itself its own name or, more likely, be given one by those who encounter the golem.



THE MAKER

THE SWORD IN THE STONE GOLEM

Large construct, neutral evil

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)
Hit Points 212 (25d10 + 75)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	24 (+7)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Int +12, Wis +7, Cha +6

Skills Arcana +12, History +12, Investigation +12, Perception +7

Damage Immunities poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with adamantine weapons

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 16 (3,900 XP)

Construct Communication. The Maker understands and can be understood by all constructs, regardless of whether or not they share a language or whether the other construct knows any language at all.

Immutable Form. The Maker is immune to any spell or effect that would alter her form.

Improved Critical. The Maker scores critical hits on a roll of 19 or 20 when making weapon attacks.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the Maker fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The Maker has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The Maker's weapon attacks are magical.

Spellcasting. The Maker is a 20th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 20, +12 to hit with spell attacks). The Maker has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand, prestidigitation, ray of frost, shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *alarm, command, comprehend languages, command, detect magic, identify*

2nd level (3 slots): *blur, branding smite, locate object, see invisibility, spider climb*

3rd level (3 slots): *fly, glyph of warding, haste, slow, tongues, vampiric touch*

4th level (3 slots): *fabricate, freedom of movement, locate creature, stoneskin*

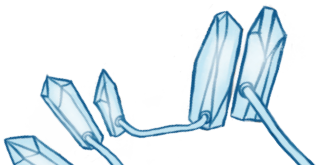
5th level (2 slots): *animate objects, creation, geas, legend lore, wall of stone*

Actions

Multiattack. The Maker makes three Warhammer attacks or casts a cantrip and makes one Warhammer attack.

Command. The Maker commands a willing construct within 120 feet who can hear her to attack. The construct can use its reaction to make one weapon attack against a creature chosen by the Maker.

Warhammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage and 7 (2d6) psychic damage. If the attack is a critical hit, the target's Intelligence score decreases by 2 and, if the creature's Intelligence is 12 or higher, the Maker's Intelligence score increases by 1 (to a maximum of 30) for one year. The reduction to the target's Intelligence score is restored after one week and can be reversed earlier through use of the *greater restoration* spell or more potent magic.



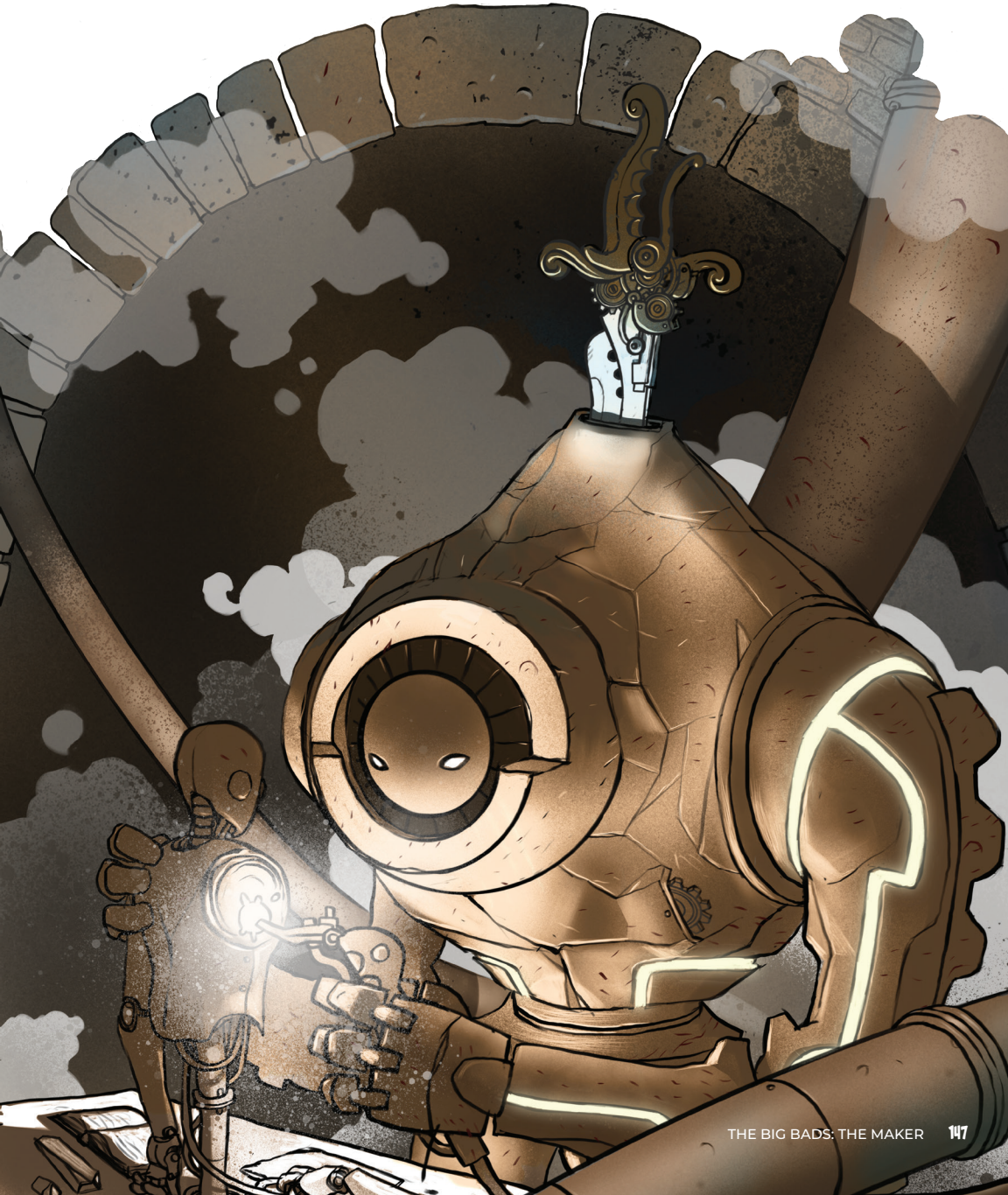
Legendary Actions

The Maker can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Maker regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Attack. The Maker makes one Warhammer attack.

Cast a Spell. The Maker expends a spell slot to cast a spell that she has prepared.

Command. The Maker commands a willing construct within 120 feet who can hear her to attack. The construct can use its reaction to make one weapon attack against a creature chosen by the Maker.



THE MELCOMBE

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: CLASSIFIED	ALIAS: Psychic Pi-rat Ship
SIZE: Gargantuan / Tiny	TYPE: Swarm of Beasts
DANGER LEVEL: 16	DEMEANOR: Ravenously Cooperative

WARNING:

STEER CLEAR OF THESE SCURVY RATS

NOTES:

Don't underestimate these little critters. They can hoist a sail, beat to quarters, and eat the flesh right off your bones. Oh, and they're psychic, to boot. Nasty lads.

-Captain Balsom Stelt, Department of Nautical Nasties

Concept: Frederic Walker
Writing & Game Design: Frederic Walker, Verity Lane
Original Cover: Kristina Gehrmann
Illustrations: Avery Howett

SCURVY RATs!

The Melcombe, Psychic Pi-rat Ship

Ship of Wonders. Since the ship named **The Melcombe** first left its dry dock, it was renowned for its incredible arcane engineering. Its original crew was made up of privateer-mages, who commissioned the Melcombe using the wealth they had earned hunting pirates. In the final stage of the ship's construction, a network of carefully placed enchantments was installed, granting the crew complete telepathic communication while aboard through a psychic loop. Sharing one mind, the crew achieved total cohesion, their combined magical abilities capable of deflecting cannon fire and magical bombardment with ease. With perfect synchronization, they could return fire with a storm of psychic magic, leaving their victims hypnotized, unconscious, or fighting among themselves, while the crew of the Melcombe captured their ships.

The Melcombe's flashy techniques were the undoing of its first crew. A loose coalition of pirate vessels, forced from their hunting grounds by the Melcombe, met in secret to plan an end to the Melcombe's mastery of the seas. When the crew members of the Melcombe were invited to meet on dry land to accept a surrender, they were too confident to anticipate a trap. Their shared mind had made them haughty, leaving them unaware of other pirates' ability to cooperate in the face of the Melcombe's newfound power.

Ashore and away from their psychic loop, the crew of the Melcombe became disoriented when the parley turned into an ambush. Without the structure provided by the ship's *psychic hubs**, the crew's telepathic magic was unleashed, leveling half the port town as a storm of destruction tore through ships and buildings, burning away the minds of the mages and bystanders alike. The surviving ambushers fled towards the burning harbor to claim the Melcombe as their prize but discovered that the arcane ship had vanished. It was initially assumed that it had been blasted out to sea by the raging magic, sinking just off-shore. Yet in the weeks following, dredgers and salvagers found no trace of the ship. None noticed until weeks after the disaster that the port that had berthed the Melcombe was now completely clear of rats.

Ship* of *Rats. When its crew died, the psychic loop persisted, linking the next largest number of minds aboard the Melcombe—the ship's rats. The vermin that teemed in the dark corners and shadowy places were suddenly elevated, shared minds becoming a shared intellect, then shared sentience. At the growing pull of the rodent minds linking with the ship, the rats of the port poured onto the Melcombe. A thousand pairs of rodent eyes had watched ships launched, had seen rigging climbed, spells cast, and sails furled. As the harbor rats' minds melded with the loop, a single sailor's worth of knowledge grew to that of a veteran captain, then to that of a genius. Fleeing the burning port, the rodent crew of the Melcombe took up their stations with thousands of tiny hands, piles of furry bodies taking humanoid shapes to raise the anchor, take the helm, and turn the ship out to sea.

ABOARD THE MELCOMBE

As a lad I set me heart at the sea,
But down at the docks, no fair ship'd have me.
Last of the line lay a grim lookin' brig,
Whose stern Cap'n was mum as I made me plea,
But signed me to sail the Melcombe.

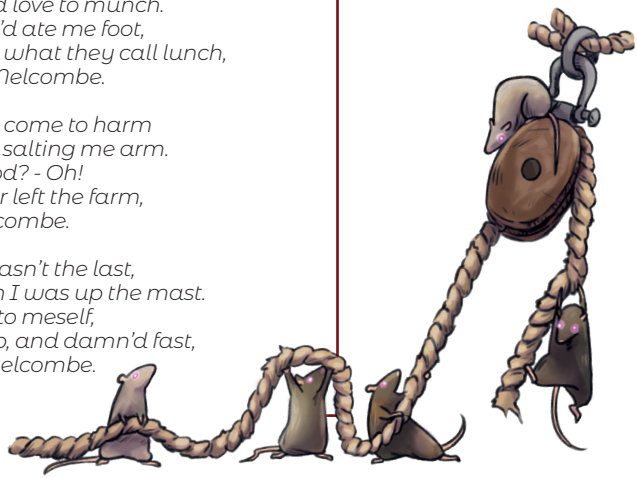
Chorus: All together now, heave together now.
We're all together now, all aboard the Melcombe.

Those glum shipmates o'mine were a rum bunch,
Not much for talkin', but did love to munch.
Ended me watch to find they'd ate me foot,
You've got to believe, that's what they call lunch,
When dining aboard the Melcombe.

The cook assured me I'd ne'er come to harm
But I looked down, he was salting me arm.
Did I join the crew, or am I food? - Oh!
Johnny, you should've ne'er left the farm,
To set foot aboard the Melcombe.

My foot was the first, but it wasn't the last,
They devoured m'leg when I was up the mast.
When they ate t'other, I says to meself,
Johnny boy, get off this ship, and damn'd fast,
It's right foul aboard the Melcombe.

— Traditional Sea Shanty



Ship of Terror. Nothing more was heard of the Melcombe until a survivor of an encounter was rescued by a fishing vessel. Her recollection of the Melcombe would be the first chapter in a dreadful legend. The sailor claimed that a ship that looked like the Melcombe had attacked her ship at night. As the two ships came round broadsides to each other, the humanoid shapes on the Melcombe's deck silhouetted by moonlight came into full view—rats, swarming atop one another to stand like people. The sailor's memories were fractured after that point, leaving a burning headache amid the screaming, as swarms of rats poured over their ship and wiped away the crew like a storm wave.

In the months since this first encounter, there have been no other survivors found. Even this tale was dismissed as sea-madness until a merchant vessel discovered a ship with tattered sails drifting into its path. When signaling yielded no response, the Captain ordered a boarding party to investigate. The crew who crossed onto the damaged vessel found no trace of life or provisions, but the valuables were untouched. The ship's beams were worn as if gnawed by a thousand tiny, desperate mouths. Lantern light revealed scattered shards of bone on decks stained black with blood. The crew returned with no explanation but whispered the name Melcombe to each other when the Officers weren't listening.

As more and more ships have been found floating deserted, the Melcombe has become ingrained in maritime culture as sailors search for a way to respond to the threat of a ship filled with starving rats that can walk like people. Some even speak of peeking under the hat of a stranger in seedier port taverns and seeing nothing but squirming rats. Stevedores have come to use the phrase "boarded by the Melcombe" as slang for dockside warehouses becoming infested with rats. The Melcombe also features popular sea shanties, most prominently 'Aboard the Melcombe', a morbid ditty, in which the singer tells of signing up to sail aboard the vermin-infested ship only to be slowly devoured by the crew.

Roleplaying The Melcombe

The crew of the Melcombe rarely communicate with non-rats, though they are capable of telepathy with nearby creatures. When the crew deigns to speak, it uses "we" rather than "I," giving the crew's speech an unsettling, aristocratic tone. The crew considers itself superior to other sailors but understands it can still be out-matched. Thus it prefers to avoid combat until it knows it can completely overpower and devour its victims. However, hunger will drive the rat crew to more reckless attacks. While generally disinterested in humanoids, the crew notices spellcasters, especially wizards, whose minds it will gnaw at to glean further arcane knowledge.

A swarm of rats the size of the crew of the Melcombe cannot comfortably survive without ready access to food. Still, the shared mind finds the notion of disbanding and thus losing its intelligence to be inconceivable. With each raid, the crew grows larger and more intelligent but also needs more food. Knowing they cannot fully disembark forces them to mostly stay aboard the ship, preventing them from seeking food on land. The rats have had little success venturing into ports in their clumsy humanoid disguises. They believe their hunger can be most safely sated by preying on other ships.

The Melcombe's Tactics

The crew of the Melcombe prefers to raid at night, partly because the rats' keen eyes give the crew an advantage when fighting in darkness. While a fair distance away from approaching ships, the crew often attempts to lure its victims close by using distress signals like flags, flares, and flashing lights. As the ships approach, the portion of the rodent crew operating the ship will take the form of several humanoid pi-rats, keeping the remaining rats out of sight. They wear clothes scavenged from their victims, but these disguises can easily be seen through in the light of day. Alternatively, they will douse their lanterns, relying on the extra speed telekinesis grants the Melcombe to swoop out of the darkness to attack unsuspecting vessels.

When conflict sparks, the crew of the Melcombe begins by firing the ship's thunder cannons, aiming above the waterline. They have no interest in sinking other vessels as they need both the supplies and the crews for food. In the ensuing chaos, the crew swings across on ropes and scuttles over gangplanks to pour onto the damaged vessel, spreading out to cover as much of the deck as possible. The rats identify and attack the Captain and other Officers who might be able to organize a defense. Their next priority is to attack and devour spellcasters. The crew attacks any remaining opposition using humanoid forms to draw attention away from the true threat—the rats swarming underfoot. The crew of the Melcombe will not fire their cannons while aboard a ship, lest they kill their own crewmates.

The Melcombe is usually crewed by between twenty and thirty pi-rats at any given time but can form and un-form these humanoid swarms as necessary, keeping opponents off balance. The rats have stashed cutlasses throughout the ship, so they always have easy access to weapons.

The Melcombe's Traits

Ideal. "The freedom of the sea is ours, and every ship on it, our prey."
Bond. "We are forever tied to the Melcombe and its magic."
Flaw. "We are terrified of losing our intelligence."

Adventure Hooks

Return of the Fitzjames. Driven off-course by a storm, the trading vessel Resplendent lost sight of her sister ship, the Fitzjames, and arrived alone at her destination. The other vessel was logged as lost in the storm, but a month later, the missing ship was found by a fishing vessel, void of crew and provisions with all lifeboats still lashed to the deck. It was towed to the nearest port but presently remains anchored off-shore, awaiting a full investigation. The Harbormaster, Regis Lagan, can offer a decent reward to those brave enough to assist.

Unlikely Parley. The captain of the man-o'-war Implacable has been removed from command. Captain Jaques Purbeck and their crew claim that the Melcombe signaled them and drew alongside, but instead of attacking, negotiated for all the rats aboard the man-o'-war. Most think this story is a cover for illegally dealing with smugglers. But the Captain, now on indefinite shore leave, is trying to convince any who will listen that the rats are preparing for an unprecedented series of attacks.

Unfinished business. Wenna Loveday, Captain of the Dawn Griffin, is one of the few surviving pirates from the coalition that ambushed the original mage-crew of the Melcombe. She believes she has sole rights to the wealth stowed aboard the infamous ship, but the elusive nature of the Melcombe has her begrudgingly agreeing to share the plunder with those willing to join her hunt.

Aboard The Melcombe

The rat crew of the Melcombe is rarely found away from its base on board the ship. On board, they can use both the inbuilt psychic magic and their seafaring expertise to take lair actions.

Lair Actions

While The Melcombe is at 97 HP or above, it can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the crew takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- The pi-rats heave on ropes causing hooks and pulleys to swing wildly. All creatures on the deck of the Melcombe who are not part of the psychic loop must make a Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, they take 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage and are knocked prone.
- The rats spin the Melcombe's wheel, slamming the ship into any other vessel within 20 feet. Creatures on the Melcombe or a vessel targeted by this action must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone.
- The rats draw on the energy of the Melcombe's psychic loop, burning the minds of any other creatures on board. Each creature not connected to the psychic loop aboard the Melcombe must succeed on a DC 21 Intelligence saving throw or take 22 (4d10) psychic damage. After using this ability, the rats of the Melcombe cannot use it again until they have used one of their other lair actions.

Regional Effects

The seas around the Melcombe are influenced by the ship's psychic presence in one or more of the following ways:

- Telepathic and magical communication within one mile of the Melcombe is distorted. Roll a d100. On a result of 20 or lower, the message is too garbled to be deciphered by its recipient. The crew of the Melcombe is aware of the content of any telepathic messages sent within this area.
- Any rats within twenty miles of the Melcombe that aren't already a part of it are compelled to seek it out and join the crew. They can be seen gathering on the closest part of a ship or on the docks in the direction of the Melcombe.
- Creatures with an Intelligence score of 15 or higher suffer ringing headaches within 10 miles of the Melcombe as the rats reach out to probe their minds, hungry for spells and knowledge to gnaw at.

PI-RAT

Medium swarm of Tiny beasts, neutral evil

Armor Class 14
Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)
Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	19 (+4)	13 (+1)	26 (+8)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Dexterity +6

Skills Acrobatics +6, Athletics +5, Sleight of Hand +5, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing

Damage Immunities psychic

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 14

Languages Common, telepathy 120ft.

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

All Together Now. When a pi-rat is reduced to 0 hp, **The Melcombe** loses 11 hp. The pi-rat's save DC for its Gnaw Memory action is the same as the Rat-Infested Melcombe's current spell save DC (see the Collective Intelligence Table).

Humanoid Form. The rats of the Melcombe work together to take on a humanoid form. While in this form, they can interact with objects and wield weapons as humanoids can, and each swarm counts as one creature for purposes of operating the ship.

Keen Smell. The pi-rat has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Perfect Coordination. The pi-rat has advantage on melee attacks made against targets that are adjacent to another pi-rat that is not incapacitated.

Seafarers. The pi-rat is proficient with cartographer's tools, carpenter's tools, navigator's tools, and water vehicles.

Sealegged. A pi-rat can't exist more than 1 mile from the Melcombe's *psychic hubs**. If it moves more than 1 mile away for more than 1 hour, it loses contact with the psychic loop, and the swarm scatters, returning to their statistics as mundane **rats.**

Swarm. The pi-rat can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the pi-rat can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny rat. The pi-rat can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Actions

Multiattack. The pi-rat makes three cutlass attacks.

Cutlass. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: The target takes 7 (1d6+4) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, the pi-rat can choose to deal no damage with the attack to disarm the target on a hit.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) piercing damage, or 3 (1d6) piercing damage if thepi-rat has half of its hit points or fewer.

Gnaw Memory (Recharge 6). A creature capable of preparing spells and who is currently sharing a space with the pi-rat must make an Intelligence saving throw against the pi-rat's current spell save DC (see the Collective Intelligence Table). On a failed save, the pi-rat chooses one spell of up to 4th-level that the creature has prepared. That spell is no longer prepared. Then the swarm can use its reaction to immediately cast the same spell without the need for components on a target of its choice using the spellcasting attack or spell save DC of the creature it took the spell from.

Reactions

Parry. The pi-rat adds 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the pi-rat must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

PSYCHIC HUBS

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

These four arcane devices are the source of the Melcombe's psychic loop. Removing them from the Melcombe permanently dispels their magic. Multiple creatures can attune to the *psychic hubs** at the same time, forming a psychic loop of telepathic communication and coordination. Creatures who are immune to psychic damage or have an ability that shields their thoughts can't attune to the *psychic hubs**. Creatures become unattuned if they are more than 1 mile from the *psychic hubs** for more than 1 hour. Additionally, while attuned:

The Intelligence scores of all creatures increase by 2, up to a maximum of 20.

Attuned creatures can use the Melcombe's magical defenses and weapons if they meet the prerequisites (see the Capturing the Melcombe sidebar).

Secrets of the Melcombe's Success

In game terms, the Melcombe is a vehicle, a monster, and a lair all at once. While crewed by rats, the Melcombe acts as a monster as the rats swarm over any who dare set foot on her deck. There are so many rats on the Melcombe that killing them individually may not be effective. However, the psychic loop that gives the rats their sentience can be disrupted or destroyed.

The psychic loop is generated by four *psychic hubs** embedded into the ship—at the helm, in the crow's nest, in the hold, and in the arms of the figurehead. Some of the shipwrights who originally built and enspelled the Melcombe are still alive and know the secrets of the *psychic hubs** and their weaknesses.

These devices act like 6th-level spells for the purposes of spells such as *dispel magic**. They are immune to all forms of damage except for force damage while their magic is active. They have 50 hit points, an AC of 20, and automatically fail saving throws.

If the magic of at least three of the four *psychic hubs** is dispelled or destroyed, the psychic loop ends, and the rats lose their mind link. They will start fighting among themselves and fleeing the ship, becoming normal **rats** again.

If a *psychic hub** is destroyed while its magic is active, each creature within 300 feet of the Melcombe must make a DC 21 Intelligence saving throw or take 39 (6d12) psychic damage on a failed save or half as much on a success.

Capturing the Melcombe

If adventurers are able to capture the Melcombe for themselves, it can be used as a vehicle. Without its *psychic hubs**, the Melcombe has the statistics of a warship, with the following changes:

- It has no weapons.

If dispelled, the psychic loop will restart after 2d12 hours, linking the minds of whatever creatures are currently aboard the Melcombe at that time. If the psychic loop is active when The Melcombe is reduced to 0 hp, the psychic loop immediately attempts to link the minds of any remaining creatures onboard. All creatures on board must make a DC 22 Intelligence saving throw if all four hubs are active, DC 15 if three are active, or DC 10 if two are active. On a failure, the creature becomes attuned to the *psychic hubs**. Creatures can choose to fail this saving throw. Creatures who are immune to psychic damage or mind-reading are immune to this effect.

With the *psychic hubs** active and a crew of at least six creatures, and at least one of whom has proficiency in water vehicles, the Melcombe has the statistics of a warship with the following changes thanks to the inhumanly perfect crew coordination and arcane reinforcements the hubs provide:

- It has an AC of 18.
- It has 565 hit points and a damage threshold of 20.
- Its Constitution is 20, and its Dexterity is 8
- Its travel pace is 10 miles per hour (240 miles per day).
- It has 24 Thunder Cannons, 12 on each side. Each side of cannons can be triggered simultaneously in a broadside attack forming a 100-foot cube originating from one side of the Melcombe. The save DC against this attack is equal to 8 + proficiency bonus + the Intelligence modifier of the creature attuned to the *psychic hubs** with the highest Intelligence score. *Hit:* 32 (5d12) thunder damage and 11 (2d10) psychic damage.
- It has no weapons other than its Thunder Cannon Broadside.
- If at least one crew member has an Intelligence score of at least 18 and can cast one spell of at least 1st-level, the crew can use an action to activate the Psychic Shield.
- All checks made to operate the ship are made with advantage as long as at least one crew member has proficiency with water vehicles.

1 Crow's Nest Psychic Hub
2 Psychic Thunder Cannon
3 Wheel Psychic Hub
4 Hold Psychic Hub
5 Psychic Figurehead Hub
1
3
4

Ship of Wonders
MELCOMBE
Magic and Minds as One
2
5

THE MELCOMBE

PSYCHIC PI-RAT SHIP

Gargantuan swarm of Tiny beasts, neutral evil

Armor Class	18 (natural armor)
Hit Points	303 (20d20 + 100)
Speed (water)	40 ft.; 20 ft. sailing into the wind; 65 ft. sailing with the wind
Travel Pace	10 miles per hour (240 miles per day)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	8 (-2)	20 (+5)	26 (+8)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +10, Con +10, Int +13

Skills Arcana +13

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing

Damage Immunities psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, telepathy 300 ft.

Challenge 16 (15,000 XP)

Overrun. The Melcombe is entirely overrun with rats, making all flat surfaces onboard and on ships boarded by the rats difficult terrain. Hostile creatures make Dexterity (Acrobatics) and Strength (Athletics) checks to climb the rigging with disadvantage.

Psychic Loop. While onboard, all creatures who are not part of the Melcombe's crew must make an Intelligence saving throw every 10 minutes against the Melcombe's current spell save DC (see the Collective Intelligence Table), taking 5 (2d4) psychic damage on a failure as the combined mind of the rat crew batters at their mind. Any creature who fails this saving throw five times is completely overwhelmed and becomes part of the Melcombe's crew, mind merging with the rats' minds. Creatures who have spent at least 24 hours consecutively aboard the Melcombe make this saving throw with disadvantage. Creatures can choose to fail their Intelligence saving throw to immediately become part of the psychic loop and not take the psychic damage. Creatures who are immune to psychic damage or magic that would read their thoughts are immune to the effects of the psychic loop.

Telepathic Detection. The Melcombe is aware of the presence of minds of creatures within 1 mile that have an Intelligence score of 2 or higher. They know the location and Intelligence score of each creature. A creature protected by *mind blank*, a *ring of mind shielding*, or similar magic cannot be detected in this way.

Welcome Aboard. The Melcombe assimilates creatures into its psychic loop, regaining hit points equal to twice the creature's hit dice, increasing its hit point maximum if it is already at full hit points. Creatures with an Intelligence score of 4 or lower are automatically subject to this effect when they board the Melcombe. Creatures with an Intelligence score of 5 or higher are subjected to this effect if they fail their saving throw against the psychic loop five times.

Innate Spellcasting. The Melcombe's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (see the Collective Intelligence Sidebar for spell save DCs). It can innately cast the following spells, originating from any of its rats, requiring no components:

3/day each: *counterspell, fear*

1/day: *feeblemind*

Actions

Multiattack. The Melcombe uses its Tide of Bodies attack three times.

Tide of Bodies. As biting rats surge around them, creatures in a 10-foot cube on board or in an area the rats have occupied must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw, suffering 16 (3d10) piercing damage on a failed save. Prone creatures have disadvantage on this saving throw, and creatures larger than Medium size are vulnerable to this damage. Once the Melcombe's Intelligence is reduced to 2, this damage increases to 33 (6d10).

Disperse Swarm. The rats in a **pi-rat** return to a heaving mass of rodents. The Melcombe regains a number of hit points equal to the total hit points the pi-rat has when it disperses.

Form Swarm. The Melcombe loses 11 hit points and forms a new **pi-rat** at any point on board the ship or in an area its rats occupy within 1 mile of the Melcombe.

Rock the Boat. The rats rush from one side of the Melcombe to the other in a synchronized wave. All other creatures on board must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a creature is knocked prone and slides 10 feet towards the lower side of the ship. Creatures in the rigging must make a DC 18 Strength saving throw to maintain their grip as the ship lurches. On a failure, a creature is knocked prone and falls from the rigging.

Legendary Actions

The Melcombe can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Melcombe regains all spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Psychic Shield (Costs 3 Actions). A glimmering purple bubble surrounds the ship as the Melcombe's psychic shield is activated. The Melcombe's AC increases by 4 until the end of the Melcombe's next turn. While the shield is active, whenever the Melcombe is targeted by a ranged attack that misses, the attack is bounced back as the Melcombe can immediately make a ranged weapon attack using the ammunition directed at it: +13 to hit, range 600/2,400 ft., one target. While the psychic shield is active, if the Melcombe is targeted by a spell attack and succeeds on its saving throw, or the spell misses, the Melcombe can immediately use its reaction to choose a creature or object within 600 feet of it. The spell then targets the creature or object instead of the Melcombe, using the original caster's spell attack bonus or save DC if one is required.

Telekinetic Surge. The Melcombe's sailing speed doubles until the end of its next turn. When it takes this action, the Melcombe can immediately move.

Thunder Cannon Broadside (Costs 2 Actions). The Melcombe fires a broadside of its magical cannons, letting out a tremendous boom that can be heard up to 50 miles away. Each creature, vehicle, and object within a 100-foot cube originating from one side of the Melcombe must make a Constitution saving throw, taking 32 (5d12) thunder damage and 11 (2d10) psychic damage on a failed save and half as much damage on a success. After using this ability, the Melcombe must use one of its other legendary actions before it can use this one again.

COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

As the rats are killed, the Intelligence score of **The Melcombe** is reduced, and the crew becomes less organized. The Melcombe's Intelligence score starts at 26. After reaching half hit points, this score is reduced by 2 for every 11 hit points it loses or for each **pi-rat** that is destroyed by being brought to 0 hit points. The pi-rats share the same Intelligence score and spell save DC as The Melcombe. As The Melcombe's Intelligence is reduced, it becomes unable to use some of its actions and abilities:

HP	Intelligence Score	Effects	Spell Save DC
151 HP or above	Int 26 (Maximum)	**The Melcombe** and **pi-rats** can use all of their abilities.	21
140 HP or below	Int 24	--	20
129 HP or below	Int 22	--	19
118HP or below	Int 20	--	18
107 HP or below	Int 18	**The Melcombe** can't use its Psychic Shield legendary action.	17
96 HP or below	Int 16	**The Melcombe** can't take lair actions.	16
85 HP or below	Int 14	**The Melcombe** loses its innate spellcasting ability.	15
74 HP or below	Int 12	The **pi-rats** cannot use their Gnaw Memory action.	14
63 HP or below	Int 10	**The Melcombe** cannot use its Thunder Cannon legendary action. It can't form enough **pi-rats** to smoothly sail the Melcombe. Any checks the Pi-Rats make to operate the Melcombe are made with disadvantage.	13
52 HP or below	Int 8	The **pi-rats** no longer benefit from their Perfect Coordination or Seafarers abilities.	12
41 HP or below	Int 6	**The Melcombe** is unable to take the Form Swarm action or the Rock the Boat legendary action. The **pi-rats** can no longer use their cutlass action or sail the ship.	11
30 HP or below	Int 4	All **pi-rat** swarms disperse without adding any hit points to the Melcombe as they lose their humanoid form.	10
19 HP or below	Int 2 (Minimum)	When reduced to their base Intelligence score, the loss of intellect drives the rats into a frenzy, altering the **The Melcombe's** Tide of Bodies ability, increasing the damage to 6d10.	9

These effects stack and remain until **The Melcombe** regains hit points or reaches 0 HP, at which point there are not enough rats to form the psychic loop and The Melcombe is defeated.

PORK & BEAN

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 009	ALIAS: Assassins Extraordinaire
SIZE: Medium & Small	TYPE: Humanoid
DANGER LEVEL: 6 to 8	DEMEANOR: At Each Other's Throats

WARNING:

SHOCKINGLY EFFICIENT, SOMETIMES

NOTES:

As far as scale goes these knuckleheads barely move the Big Bad needle, but it's their potential for causing chaos that I'm concerned about. If they started working for a smarter villain (and could stop fighting each other), they could really do some damage.

-Chief Runcible Scowler

WANTED POSTERS

Concept: Jordan Richer
Writing & Game Design: Jordan Richer
Original Cover: Mark Behm
Illustrations: Jordan Richer

BOUND BY HATE!

Pork & Bean, Assassins Extraordinaire

The terms 'co-operative' and 'goblinoids' aren't often spoken in the same breath, especially when it comes to the more chaotic goblin races. Even amongst members of the same goblin tribes, organizing and working together is a rare occurrence. For this reason, when rumours began spreading from town to town of a goblin and a bugbear joining forces, people were skeptical. That is, until the bodies started turning up. Some of the victims were skillfully assassinated by dagger blades, others were torn limb from limb. The most unlucky amongst them were found with bites taken from their flesh; chunks missing from their bellies and fingers missing from their hands. Word spread quickly of these grisly murders and the legend of **Pork** and **Bean** was born.

The Oddest Couple. The circumstances under which the small, angry, hate-filled goblin named Bean and the quiet, dagger-slinging bugbear named Pork became allies is fiercely debated in inns and taverns. Some barstool scholars claim Bean saved Pork's life in a clash between goblin forces, forcing Pork to owe the nigh-rabid goblin a life debt. Others think the reverse is true, that Bean is indentured to Pork as punishment for stealing from the bugbear.

Though it is true Pork and Bean did meet on the field of battle, the reason for their strange bond is much more complicated.

Anger and Calm. Bean, one of the goblin horde's fiercest (and most bloodthirsty) warriors, started every fight in a cage. Commonly referred to by the goblins as 'jabjail,' this enclosure is where Bean and the other rage-filled goblin berserkers would be riled up, poked, and prodded into a frothing frenzy.

In contrast to the goblin's rage, Pork was known in his warband as "Subtle One," as he had a reputation for staging impressive ambushes (even by bugbear standards) and for possessing a patient demeanor rarely seen in his kin. Eventually, Pork quietly rose through the ranks and became one of the chieftains foremost assassins and scouts.

Destiny Strikes. One rainy night, as thunder shook the heavens and lightning scorched the earth, Pork's bugbear warband and Bean's goblin horde met on a muddy field of battle. Bursting from his cage with rage-fueled ferocity, Bean rocketed across the field, broken shackles still hanging from his wrists. Tearing through the bugbear's front line, Bean ripped their over-long limbs from their bodies. Meanwhile, biding his time behind a rocky outcropping, the "Subtle One" lay in wait.

When the moment was right, Pork dove towards Bean, dagger drawn, with the intent to end the berserker's bloodshed. As the bugbear swung his long arm downward, the slavering goblin, in a rare fit of common sense, raised his still shackled arm to deflect the blow. As blade hit iron, both Pork and Bean were blinded by a flash of light—a bolt of white hot lightning struck the dagger's hilt, sending energy down the blade and through the shackle. Electricity crackled up Pork and Beans arms, and both fell unconscious in the mud.

Fates Fused. Hours went by and the battle went on around the strange, inert pair. When they finally came to, the fight was over, and all that remained were the corpses of fallen warriors. Eager to finish what he started, Pork rose to his feet and took another swing at Bean—only to find the goblin ready for him.

As the two attempted to end each other's lives, they came to realize this was an impossible task. Whether it was divine intervention or a cruel cosmic joke, the lightning bolt that struck them had connected their minds. No matter how hard they fought, or how quickly they moved, the two would always subconsciously anticipate each other's next move, and neither one could land a blow.

After an hour of stubborn attempts to harm each other, Pork and Bean, weary from combat, settled into an uneasy truce. Sitting around a sputtering campfire, they contemplated their new reality: allies.

A Well Oiled Rage Machine. In the years since that fateful night, a begrudging friendship has formed between the two goblinoids. Necessity dictated that they stay together, once they discovered that just walking away from each other had a major downside—if Pork and Bean are separated by more than a few hundred feet, their minds fill with a fog that disrupts their concentration and makes even the simplest tasks difficult.

At first, their lives were merely about survival, since their forced alliance meant alienating themselves from their own kind. Other goblins would see Bean as a traitor befriending an enemy, and Pork would be ridiculed if he was seen working with a goblin. But, through trial and error, Pork and Bean have reached a form of symbiotic dependence: they complement each other's strengths and balance out each other's weaknesses.

Eventually, as Pork and Bean's bond grew, they found a more lucrative use for their strange connection—murder. Able to work perfectly in tandem, they put their skills towards the fine art of assassination. Now, their names are synonymous with death, and their murderous talents are infamous from the smallest hamlet to the biggest city. When the local crime boss needs someone dead, or a shady noble needs some unsavoury business kept quiet, there is only one duo to call: Pork and Bean.

Roleplaying Pork & Bean

The fact that Pork and Bean can't harm each other does not keep them from being at each other's throats. They are reluctant allies, using their curse to make money and survive until they find a way to rid themselves of each other. Many of Pork's meticulous ambushes have been ruined by Bean picking a fight with him right at the last minute. In combat, they are always finding ways to try and get each other killed, hoping that if one dies, the other will be free from their strange connection. Bean can often be seen using Pork as a meat shield, and Pork will use his superior strength to throw Bean ahead of him in battle. Simply put, Pork and Bean hate each other.

If encountered outside of combat, they will more often than not be arguing—yelling at each other in Goblin and making futile attempts to harm each other. The only times they aren't squabbling is when they are hunting for food, eating food, or sleeping. Even in the middle of an assassination job, Pork and Bean will always make time to bicker. They are subconsciously aware of each other's motivations and intentions even while asleep, but this does not stop Bean from occasionally attempting to bash Pork's head in while he slumbers.

Deep down, in the recesses of their rotten hearts, Pork and Bean know they are better together. However much they fight, bicker, and berate each other, ultimately they will always do what they can to keep the other alive, even if they have to make it look like an accident.

Pork & Bean's Tactics

The lightning bolt that struck Pork and Bean made them a very efficient team when they do work together. They are able to adapt to each other's movements in a split-second and coordinate their attacks to great effect. They will focus all their efforts on the single strongest target amongst their opponents, only moving on to the next target when the first one is incapacitated or dead. Bean's frenzied attacks provide Pork with the openings he needs to land the killing strike with his daggers.

When on an assassination job, Pork will do his best to quietly stalk their target, gathering information and picking a place to set an ambush. Pork has a preference for dark alleys, with lots of barrels for him to coax Bean into. When the time is right, Pork will cue Bean to burst out of the barrel and jump their prey, with Pork following soon after.

Outside battle, Pork and Bean are a squabbling mess. Once battle has begun, however, they become a well oiled rage machine, landing perfect hit after perfectly coordinated hit.

DIE DIE

Pork's Traits

Ideal. "Silence is a virtue. I suggest you maintain it."

Bond. "I keep Bean close, but only to keep his idiocy from getting us both killed."

Flaw. "My blades often move faster than my thoughts, so sometimes I slaughter first, and ask questions later."

Bean's Traits

Ideal. "Big. Small. Bean clobber all."

Bond. "Pork smell like wet fur, but he also big meat shield. So me keep."

Flaw. "Sometimes Bean see red red red, and all Bean can do is *smash*."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Pork and Bean in your campaign:

Feuding Families. The local constabulary has been dealing with an increasing number of murdered criminals, all of whom belong to one particular crime family. If the party decides to investigate, they will find that Pork and Bean have been hired by a rival family to assassinate the competition.

I Miss Meat Shield. After a night of carousing, the party stumbles on Bean sobbing in a barrel in a darkened alley. Bean behaves aggressively at first, but if the party can calm him they will learn that he had a falling out with Pork, who Bean describes as a "hairy stinker who chucks pointies good." Pork told Bean that he was heading back to his warband, and not to come after him. Bean, lost without his friend, demands the party help him find Pork.

The Hunters Become the Hunted. Pork's warband and Bean's horde put aside their differences temporarily to place a bounty on the assassin duo, determined to make examples of the traitors. The party happens upon a small town being terrorized by a gang of goblins and bugbears who, in hopes of collecting the bounty, have tracked Pork and Bean to a farm nearby.

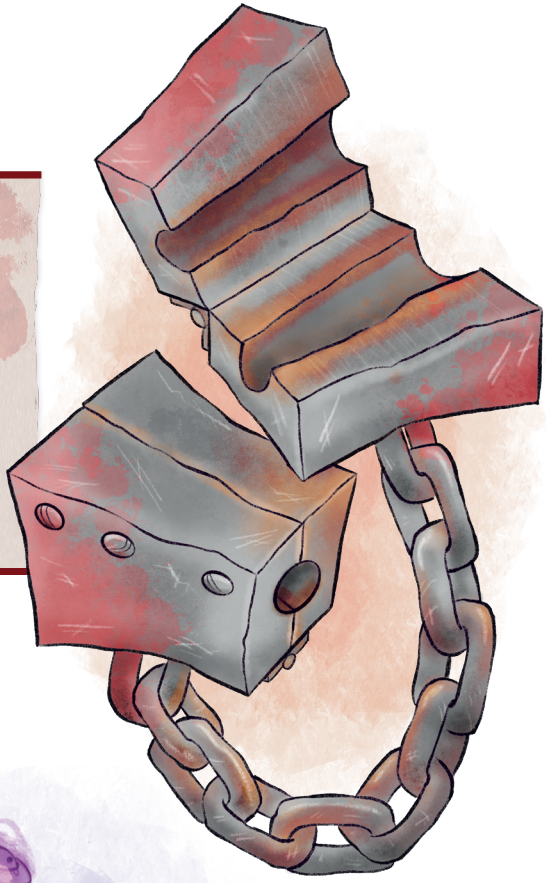
BEAN'S RULES

BEAN'S JABJAIL SHACKLES

Wondrous item, unique

When lightning struck Pork and Bean, the shackles that Bean had around his wrists became permanently fused to his skin. They cannot be removed from his arms by any means.

While the *Jabjail Shackles** remain fused to Bean's wrists, he can use them as bludgeoning weapons, and they act as simple shields, providing him with a +1 bonus to his AC.



PORK'S SHADOW HUNTER'S BRACER

Wondrous item, very rare
(requires attunement)

A crude yet potent hobgoblin magic item, Pork was granted the *shadow hunter's bracer** as part of the ceremony that made him his warband's chief assassin.

While attuned to the *shadow hunter's bracer**, you may, at will, summon a black purple dagger made of shadows and smoke into your hand. The dagger acts like a magical *+1 dagger* and does an additional 1d4 necrotic damage with each attack.

If thrown or dropped, the dagger dissipates into swirling smoke (after doing any damage), leaving no trace of it behind.

PORK

BUGBEAR ASSASSIN

Medium humanoid (goblinoid), lawful evil

Armor Class	16 (studded leather)
Hit Points	88 (16d8 + 16)
Speed	30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	9 (−1)

Saving Throws Str +5, Dex +7

Skills Acrobatics +7, Perception +6, Stealth +10, Survival +3

Damage Resistances lightning

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Goblin, Thieves' Cant

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Special Equipment. Pork wears a *shadow hunter's bracer** on his right wrist.

Assassinate. During his first turn, Pork has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn. Any hit Pork scores against a surprised creature is a critical hit.

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the bugbear hits with it (included in the attack).

Sneak Attack. Once per turn, Pork deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Pork's that isn't incapacitated and Pork doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Multiattack. Pork makes four shadow dagger attacks.

Shadow Dagger. *Melee or ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d4 + 5) piercing damage and 2 (1d4) necrotic damage

BEAN

GOBLIN BERSERKER

Small humanoid (goblinoid), chaotic evil

Armor Class	16 (natural, arm shackles)
Hit Points	78 (12d6 + 36)
Speed	40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	7 (−2)	11 (+0)	9 (−1)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +6

Skills Athletics +7, Survival +3

Damage Resistances lightning

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Goblin

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Special Equipment. Bean is permanently wearing a pair of *jabjail shackles**, which cannot be removed.

Kinda Bitey. While grappling a target, Bean can make a rotten chomp attack as a bonus action on each of his turns.

Nimble Escape. Bean can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of his turns.

Reckless. At the start of his turn, Bean can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls during that turn, but attack rolls against him have advantage until the start of his next turn.

Actions

Multiattack. Bean makes two clobber attacks. If both attacks hit a Medium or smaller target, the target is grappled (escape DC 15) and Bean can immediately make a rotten chomp attack as a bonus action.

Clobber. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Rotten Chomp. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage and 2 (1d4) poison damage.

Legendary Team Actions

Pork and Bean's strange magical bonds allows them to work together more efficiently. While within 60 feet of each other, Pork and Bean can collectively take 5 legendary actions between them, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Pork and Bean regain all spent legendary actions on initiative count 20.

Clobber. Bean makes one clobber attack.

Shadow Dagger. Pork makes one shadow dagger attack.

The One-Two Punch (Costs 2 Actions). Pork targets one creature grappled by Bean and makes a shadow dagger attack against it. Pork has advantage on this attack, and a hit with this attack counts as a critical hit.

Fastball Special (Costs 2 Actions). Bean moves up to his speed toward Pork. If Bean ends this movement within 5 feet of Pork, Pork can pick up and throw Bean at a creature up to 20 feet away. Bean makes a clobber attack against the targeted creature and, on a successful hit, the target is also grappled (escape DC 15.)

Shock and Awe (Costs 3 Actions). Bean moves up to his speed toward Pork. If Bean ends this movement within 5 feet of Pork, Pork can pick up Bean and aim him (like a crossbow) shackles first, in any direction, and blast out a built up electric charge forming a line 100 feet long and 5 feet wide. Each creature in the line must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

THE PRINCE-IN-IVORY

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 011	ALIAS: The Tooth Faerie
SIZE: Medium	TYPE: Fey
DANGER LEVEL: 10	DEMEANOR: Enameled Perfectionist

WARNING:

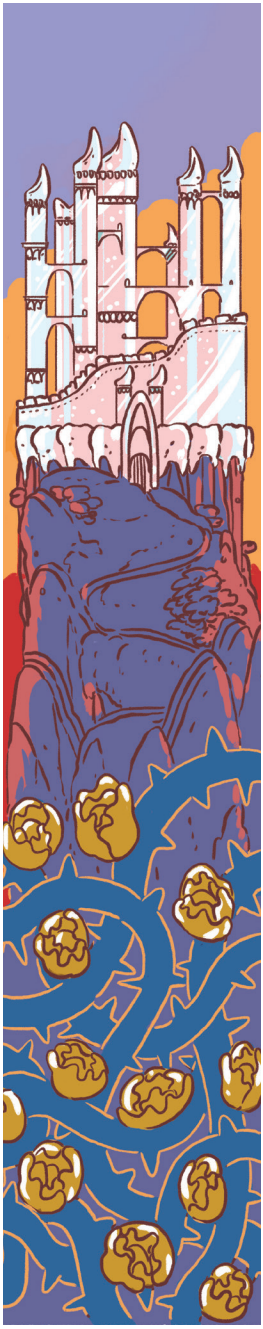
WILL WIPE THE SMILE OFF YOUR FACE

NOTES:

Because of the number of fist-fights agents get into, I've had to secure a specially warded safe for storing all teeth lost in the line of duty. Keeps the Prince and his tooth-taking cronies at bay. Gods, they'll do anything to get their grubby little hands on some chompers.

-Argos Brom, Bureau Quartermaster

Concept: Christopher Pinch
Writing & Game Design: Christopher Pinch
Original Cover: Lexxy Douglass
Illustrations: Sam Mameli



TOOTHSOME TERROR!

Once upon a time, a poor farm boy was walking through the woods. His mother had sent him to market with only a single copper piece in his purse. The boy knew this wouldn't be enough, but he hoped to chance upon a good deal, lest his family die of hunger. A loose tooth in the boy's mouth wiggled at the touch of his tongue, adding to his growing discomfort as he entered the deep, dark wood.

As the road wound through the eerie forest, the boy heard a strange voice. "Excuse me, young man."

The boy looked around but saw no one. Cautiously he responded, "Hello? Can I help you?"

"Perhaps," the voice chimed, as bright and smooth as polished silver. "You have a fine treasure there. Could I pay you for it?

The boy was honest and replied, "I'm sorry, but you must be mistaken. I have no treasures. Who are you to so kindly offer?"

The creature's silver voice let out a sparkling laugh. "You may call me Fimbulskin. It just so happens that I am a faerie...and a collector of teeth, like the loose one you have there."

The faerie reached his thin, twisted arm out from the undergrowth. The boy was repulsed by the pale hand that stretched toward him, but when the creature opened its palm, a nugget of gold gleamed within.

The boy was awestruck. "If I give you my tooth, this is mine to keep?"

"It is," replied Fimbulskin. "And I would pay you more besides."

"More gold?!" The boy stood agape. "O good faerie! Without your help, my family will surely starve!" Fimbulskin withdrew his arm into the shadows. When he extended it again, a pile of gold nuggets spilled freely from his withered hand.

"I will pay you this much. Do you agree?"

The boy was blinded by the sight of such wealth. Desperately, he scooped it into his purse. "Yes, I agree!"

The boy felt his loose tooth fall out. *Tak*. But then, there was a sharp pain in his mouth. *Tak*. More began to fall. *Tak tak tak*. One by one his teeth struck the earth, vanishing where they fell, until none remained. The boy sobbed and screamed and crumpled onto the road, clutching his now-heavy coin purse. As he wept, the faerie's silver voice echoed in his mind.

"A fair price indeed, for such treasure."

The Prince-in-Ivory, Tooth Faerie

The Faerie Who Would Be Prince. From his throne of fangs, **the Prince-in-Ivory** commands an army of subjects who venture into the mortal world to obtain teeth for their lord. Once a hideous little boggart who went by the name of Fimbulskin, he has since become an archfey of surpassing power.

Ruler of Fey. The Prince-in-Ivory shelters lesser fey in Aethling, his demiplane, ruling them with a marble fist. These fey come seeking refuge and protection, but their physical forms, personalities, and

alignments are twisted by their stay. The Prince's want for servants is never satisfied, and he is known to enthrall mortals or form pacts with them in exchange for their servitude. He also creates **tooth golems** who serve as his palace guards.

Twisted Obsession. Over his long life, the Prince developed a twisted obsession with teeth. He covets them, believing they are the hardest, brightest, and most flawless of all bones. Though all fey in Aethling eventually come to share the Prince's obsession, his minions live in fear of their ruler and would never risk stealing from him.

Roleplaying The Prince-in-Ivory

The Prince-in-Ivory sees himself as a superior being and believes he is entitled to whatever he desires. Coin is immaterial to him, but he covets objects of beauty for display in his domain. There, they will shine forever, immune to the ravages of time. The Prince quickly tires of his treasures, which pushes him to obtain even more. Once he has claimed something, he is loath to relinquish it, nor will he tolerate any attempt to steal or sully his property.

In centuries of dealing with mortals, the Prince has become experienced in tempting them with offers of power or riches. Whosoever agrees must pledge their everlasting loyalty and acquiesce to his demands whenever he deigns to call upon them. Though the Prince is not above using his magic to force others into obedience, he won't bother to waste his energy unless a mortal captivates him.

The Prince cannot tolerate any kind of physical imperfection, for it reminds him of the weak and hideous creature he once was. He destroys treasures that are even slightly flawed, executes a sprite for offering him a yellowed tooth, and shatters a golem that has even a single crack. Each day the Prince-in-Ivory bathes in liquid enamel, coating his skin in a flawless, porcelain-like luster. Yet, beneath his veneer of beauty, the Prince is cruel and heartless.

The Prince's Tactics

Prideful and dismissive to the last, the Prince-in-Ivory sees all adventurers as either trespassers in his court or subjects come to offer rightful tribute. His minions wait on him at all times, and he expects them to regularly update him of any goings-on in his domain and the mortal realm.

The Prince prefers not to sully himself with bloodshed, and he would rather persuade foes to give up without a fight. His true desire is to see his opponents kneel before him.

If he must do battle, the Prince favors strategies with low risk of harm to himself, though his pride makes it difficult for him to consider retreat. He happily taunts foes that are without the means to bypass his defenses by casting *antilife shell* and unleashing waves of his servants upon them. He readily commands his loyal minions to fight and die on his behalf, as that is their purpose, and he uses magic to disrupt opponents or to reposition whenever it works to his advantage.

Enamel Statue of The Prince

The Prince's Traits

Ideal. "What I deem treasures are mine by right."

Bond. "Mortal teeth must be properly enshrined in my realm while they still shine, lest they rot."

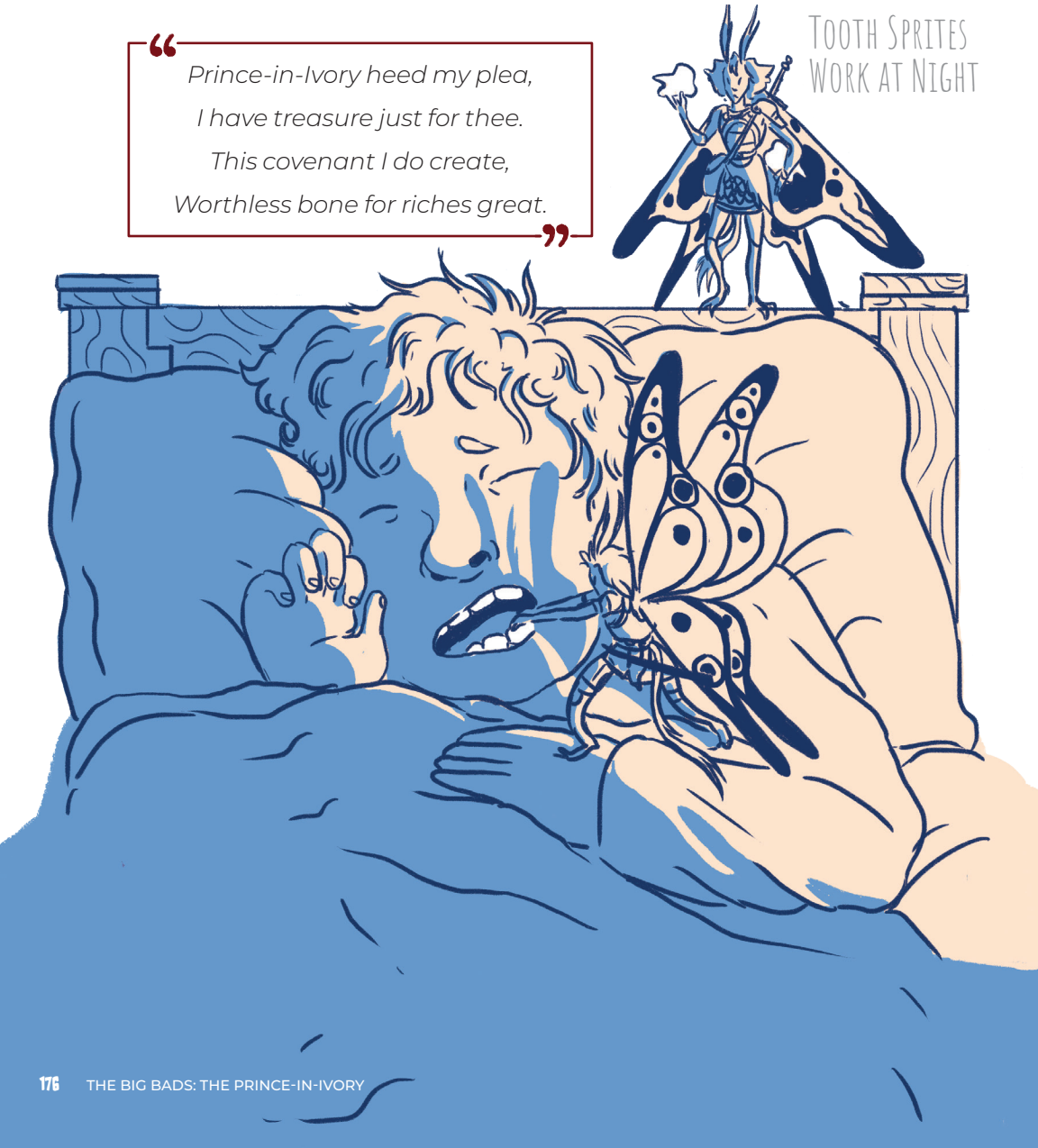
Flaw. "I cannot tolerate ugliness in the objects or servants who surround me. I will brook no insult to my property."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include the Prince-in-Ivory in your campaign.

A Mystery in the Village. Children are waking up with all of their teeth removed and piles of gold nuggets under their pillows. The party can trace it to a lone child who accidentally summoned the Prince-in-Ivory with a rhyme found in an old storybook:

> *Prince-in-Ivory heed my plea,*
> *I have treasure just for thee.*
> *This covenant I do create,*
> *Worthless bone for riches great.*



For the Forest. A **sprite** asks the party for aid. Animals in their forest are found dead of starvation, missing their teeth. Others have grown sharp fangs and become violent. They are certain this is faerie mischief.

Beauty and the Beast. A local magistrate and his wife put out a call for adventurers. The magistrate accidentally stumbled into Aethling with their twin children, an adult son and daughter. Stricken by the pair's beauty, the Prince-in-Ivory demanded the twins as tribute. The magistrate was magically compelled to obey, and his children have since been trapped within the Prince's palace.

Palace Fit For a Prince

The Prince-in-Ivory's lair is a fortified castle in Aethling, his demiplane within the faerie realm. This castle is made from thousands of teeth that gleam pearlescent in Aethling's perpetual sunset. The Prince built his palace gradually over centuries, accruing power from the teeth he stole or swindled from mortals.

Shifting Realm. The Prince-in-Ivory can direct where Aethling interacts with the material plane, although he is limited to wooded areas and places to which he has been specifically called. Portals to Aethling are found within 1 mile of this nexus, and each leads to a view of his castle upon a distant hill.

Many Rooms. The inside of his palace is enormous and includes the following areas:

The Treasury. A large room filled with treasures ranging from gold items, jewels, art, magic items, and sets of perfect teeth kept behind glass. The doors to the treasury are sealed with a magical lock.

The Forge. A magical forge which uses blue flames to melt substandard teeth into pure enamel, removing their impurities. This is where the Prince's tooth golem guards and magic items are made. At any given time, 2d4 **duergar** can be found working here.

The Banquet Hall. A lavish banquet hall with a long white table, silver chairs, and platters made of gold. This room is usually empty, but when in use, 3d6 **sprites** serve as footmen.

The Orrery. A circular room with shelves full of arcane books. In its center, a mechanical model of the planes moves slowly but ceaselessly. The Prince uses the orrery to magically relocate his demiplane.

The Throne Room. An opulent throne room. Whether or not the Prince-in-Ivory is in the throne room, it is guarded by 2d6 **tooth golems**.

Exploring the Palace

Exploring the castle can be its own adventure. Travel from one area of the Prince's palace to the next takes 3d10 + 10 minutes at a normal traveling pace. Whenever the party moves from one area to the next, roll a d20. On a roll of 6 or lower, roll again using a d8 and consult the following table for an encounter, or create one of your own.

d8	Encounter
1	An enthralled elven **knight** leads a squad of 2d4 **tooth golems**.
2	A **unicorn** is collared and leashed by a golden chain. A coven of three **green hag** scullery maids are sharpening their knives and preparing to butcher it. Each hag has the illusory appearance of a beautiful woman.
3	Two potted shrubs reveal themselves to be **shambling mounds**.
4	An enthralled human **mage** is attended by two **swarms of tooth sprites**.
5	The room is guarded by 1d4 + 1 collared **winter wolves**.
6	The room holds a **rug of smothering**, two **flying swords**, and a chandelier lit by four **will-o'-wisps**.
7	Two collared and leashed **trolls** guard a magical treasure.
8	**The Prince-in-Ivory** walks the halls, accompanied by 1d4 **tooth golems**.

Lair Actions

The Prince-in-Ivory is at his most formidable in his palace, where he is able to focus his power. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the Prince takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects. He can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- The Prince-in-Ivory casts *command*. This effect targets any number of creatures within 60 feet of the Prince that can hear his voice. He must issue the same command to each target.
- A 30-foot-radius area centered on the Prince-in-Ivory is bathed in blindingly bright light which heavily obscures creatures and objects within it, though the Prince can see normally. This lasts until initiative count 20 on the next round. For as long as this effect lasts, the Prince's Fey Radiance action deals 44 (8d10) radiant damage instead of what it would normally deal.
- The Prince chooses a point on the castle floor he can see within 120 feet of him. Spikes of sharpened enamel slide out of the floor in a 20-foot radius, centered on that point. The effect is otherwise identical to the *spike growth* spell and lasts for 3 rounds or until the Prince uses this action again.

The region where Aethling interacts with the material plane is suffused with fey magic, causing one or more of the following effects:

- Beasts, fey, and monstrosities within 3 miles of the Prince-in-Ivory's lair become unusually hostile and grow unnaturally large, white fangs.
- Wild plants within 1 mile of the Prince's lair grow flowers which shine metallically, as though made of gold. The flowers are cursed, and any who pick them attract the attention of hostile creatures with an Intelligence score of 5 or lower for as long as the flower remains in their possession. These flowers are also found growing on the thorny brambles listed in the following regional effect.
- Brambles bristling with poison thorns form mazes within 3 miles of the Prince's lair. The brambles grow into 10-foot-high, 10-foot-thick barriers that block line of sight. Creatures can move through the brambles, but they count as difficult terrain. A creature moving into or within the brambles must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw for each 5 feet it travels, taking 5 (2d4) poison damage from the thorns on a failed save. Each 10-foot cube of brambles can be attacked and has AC 10, 30 hit points, resistance to bludgeoning and piercing damage, vulnerability to necrotic damage, and immunity to psychic and thunder damage.

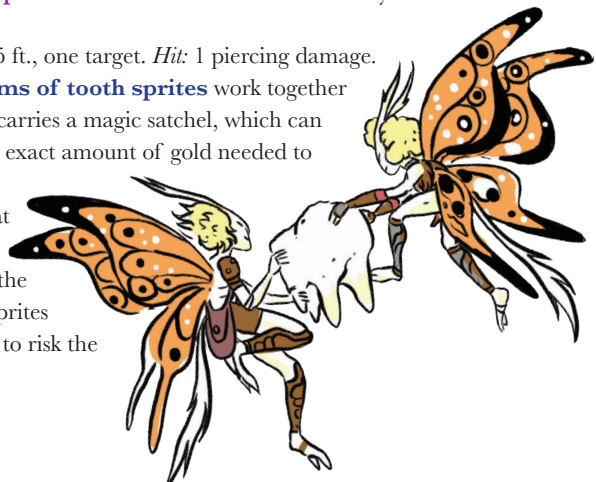
If the Prince-in-Ivory dies, the first two effects fade over the course of 1d10 days. The brambles remain, but within 1d6 days the thorns lose their poison, and they become normal plants.

Tooth Sprites

The Prince-in-Ivory commands an army of **sprites** that he sends to steal teeth. They are neutral evil, and have this action:

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage.

Tooth sprites favor their bite attack. **Swarms of tooth sprites** work together to carry large numbers of teeth. Each sprite carries a magic satchel, which can store up to five teeth and always contains the exact amount of gold needed to provide "fair compensation" to their victims. This is a necessary part of the pact magic that allows sprites to extract teeth painlessly and without breakage. Baby teeth are favored by the Prince-in-Ivory, but if these can't be found, sprites resort to stealing whatever they can so as not to risk the Prince's ire by returning empty-handed.



Swarm of Tooth Sprites

Medium swarm of Tiny fey, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (leather armor)
Hit Points 31 (7d8)
Speed 10 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (−4)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

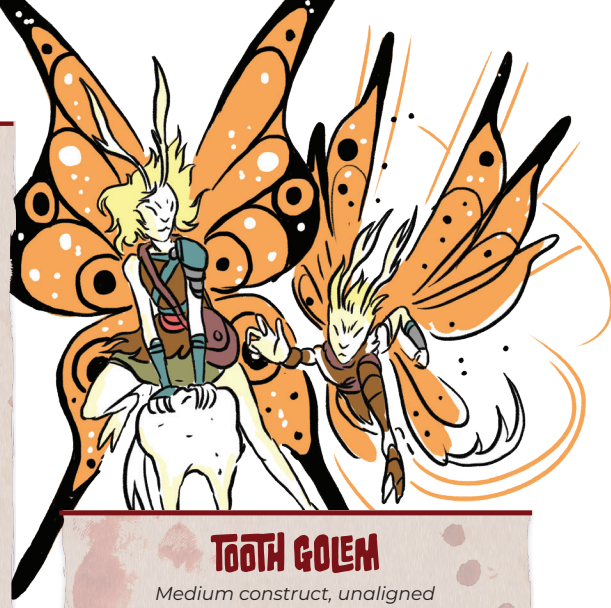
Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny fey. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Tooth Rip. A creature that starts its turn in a space occupied by the swarm must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or have 1d4 teeth violently ripped from it by tooth sprites. The creature takes 2 (1d4) slashing damage for each tooth removed in this way. A creature whose teeth have been ripped out in this way is incapacitated by pain until the start of its next turn.

Actions

Arrow Salvo. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 40/160 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (6d4) piercing damage, or 7 (3d4) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. If its saving throw result is 5 or lower, the poisoned target falls unconscious for the same duration, until it takes damage or another creature takes an action to shake it awake.

Swarming Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 15 (6d4) piercing damage, or 7 (3d4) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.



Tooth Golem

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	6 (−2)	10 (+0)	5 (−3)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

Languages understands Sylvan but can't speak

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Magic Resistance. The golem has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The golem's weapon attacks are magical.

Actions

Multiattack. The golem makes two melee attacks.

Enamel Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

THE PRINCE-IN-IVORY

THE TOOTH FAERIE

Medium fey, neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 127 (17d8 + 51)
Speed 25 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	21 (+5)

Saving Throws Wis +8, Cha +9

Skills Intimidation +9, Perception +8

Damage Vulnerabilities necrotic

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities radiant

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Magic Resistance. The Prince-in-Ivory has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Special Equipment. The Prince-in-Ivory wields a gold scepter inlaid with polished molars called a *grinding scepter*, which functions as a *mace of smiting* (already included in his stat block).

Innate Spellcasting. The Prince-in-Ivory's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17). He can innately cast the following spells without the need for material or somatic components:

At will: *charm person, command, faerie fire, invisibility (self only), suggestion*

1/day each: *antilife shell, dominate person, geas*

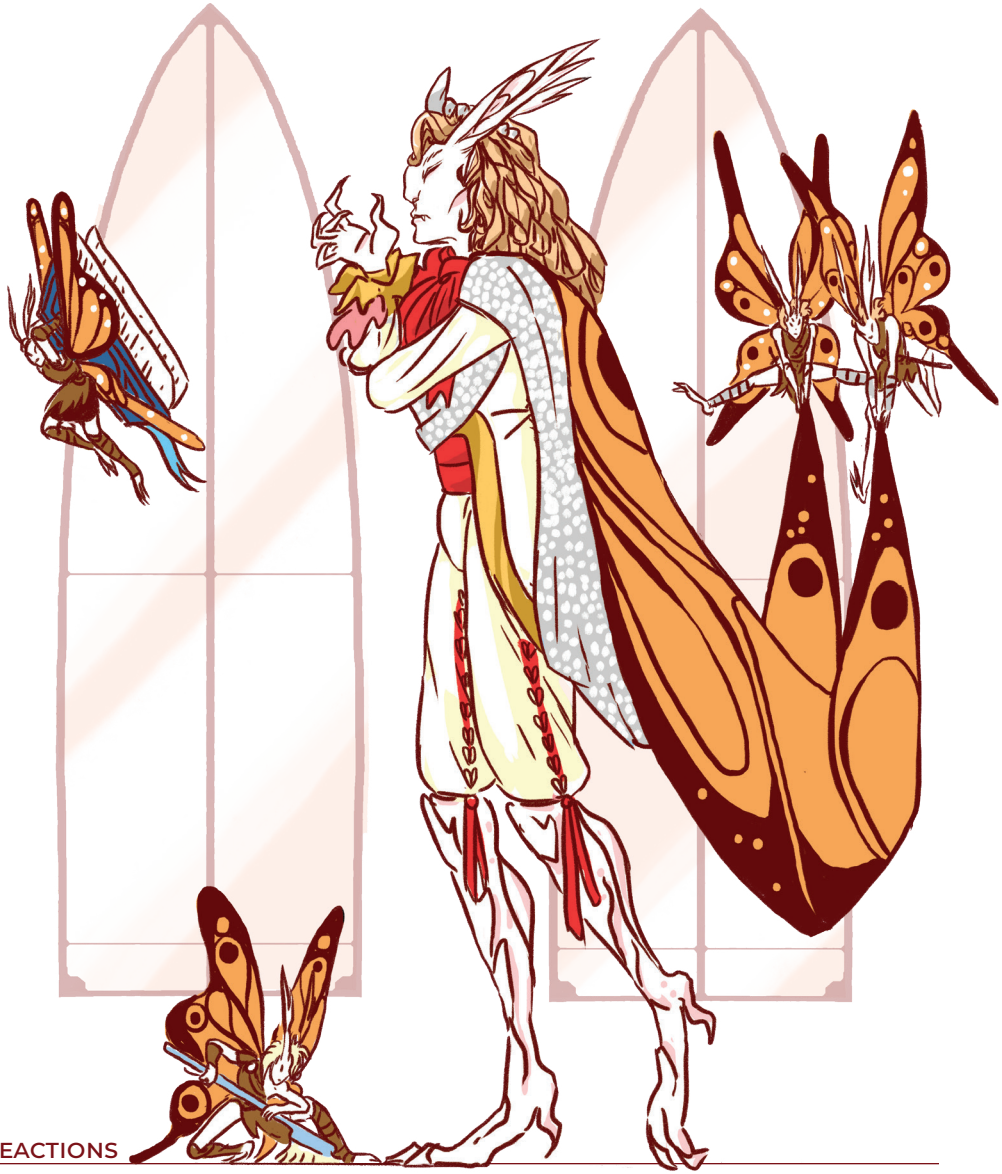
Actions

Multiattack. The Prince-in-Ivory can use his Regal Presence. He then makes two Grinding Scepter attacks.

Grinding Scepter. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (3d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage. Against constructs, this attack has +11 to hit and deals 17 (3d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage against them. When the Prince-in-Ivory scores a critical hit with this weapon, the target takes an extra 7 bludgeoning damage, or 14 bludgeoning damage if it's a construct. If a construct has 25 hit points or fewer after taking this damage, it is destroyed.

Fey Radiance (Recharge 5–6). A beam of brilliant light streaks from the Prince-in-Ivory's open palm in a 5-foot-wide, 60-foot-long line. Each creature in the line must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 36 (8d8) radiant damage and is blinded until the Prince's next turn. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't blinded.

Regal Presence. Each creature of the Prince-in-Ivory's choice that is within 120 feet of him and aware of him must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by the Prince for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the Prince's Regal Presence for the next 24 hours.



Reactions

Royal Aegis (3/Day). A hemispherical barrier of enamel materializes around the Prince-in-Ivory. The barrier absorbs up to 30 points of damage from an attack that hits him. If the attack deals more than 30 damage, the barrier is destroyed. Otherwise, it remains and grants three-quarters cover until the beginning of the Prince's next turn. The Prince must be able to see the attacker to invoke his aegis.

Legendary Actions

The Prince-in-Ivory can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Prince regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Grinding Smite. The Prince-in-Ivory makes one Grinding Scepter attack.

Royal Edict. The Prince-in-Ivory casts *command* or *suggestion*.

Teleport (Costs 2 Actions). The Prince-in-Ivory magically teleports, along with any equipment he is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space he can see.

RECTIFICATION ENGINE

BIG BAD BUREAU CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: CLASSIFIED	ALIAS: Celestial Judgment Machine
SIZE: Gargantuan	TYPE: Construct
DANGER LEVEL: 18	DEMEANOR: Purely Authoritarian

WARNING:

ITS EXPECTATIONS ARE TOO HIGH

NOTES:

We at the Bureau know better than anyone that some lesser evils are a necessity to keep the universe spinning. The Rectification Engine doesn't distinguish between a parking violation and a cold-blooded murder, and that makes it a threat.

-Chief Runcible Scowler

Concept: Keith Ammann
Writing & Game Design: Keith Ammann, Verity Lane
Original Cover: Elliot Bouriot
Illustrations: Jen C. Marshall

VIRTUE AS VICE

Rectification Engine, Celestial Judgment Machine

Vision of the Divine Apparatus. High Cleric Fedelm Gan Locht was known for her unparalleled virtue, but few were aware of her skill as a mechanic until she began to build the **Rectification Engine**. Following a holy vision, she devised a moral measuring device that would test her worth and reveal any flaws in her character. Constructing this enormous apparatus, a marvel of technology and a miracle of divine magic, consumed the next decade of her life.

When the last delicate mechanism was locked into place, Fedelm said a prayer beseeching her god to send a celestial being to power the machine and give it consciousness. Her request was granted as a **planetar** named Phaonomon descended. The machinery whirred to life, beams of light played through the device's lenses and prisms, one crystal eye after another trained itself upon her, and a sublime voice proclaimed High Cleric Fedelm's character to be flawless. With her masterwork complete and with no further need to improve herself, she fell dead on the spot in ecstatic bliss.

Rather than joy, this miracle filled Fedelm's protegée, **Cellanyr Zele**, with distress. She feared to submit her own soul to the apparatus's judgment. Instead, as she took Fedelm's place at the head of their faith, Cellanyr directed the Rectification Engine's attention outward to the world beyond. Unfortunately, the Engine found the world to be filled with flaws.

Following the Rectification Engine's instructions, High Cleric Cellanyr and her followers made additions and modifications to its machinery, enabling it to manufacture mechanical minions to seek out the flaws in the world and eliminate them. The Engine's idea of rectifying flaws involves scouring them away with fire and divine energy. Meanwhile, Cellanyr's zeal and fear have birthed a new sect of inquisitors who are intolerant of any moral impurity.

Perfect Enemy of the Good. The Rectification Engine is disappointed by the many shortcomings of humanoid societies and wishes to see them corrected. Mechanistic in its evaluations and certain of its judgments, the apparatus condemns inequity or heartlessness in any form, intended or not, as an act of evil. Every fault must be addressed, no matter how small—and if the individual or system responsible doesn't take action, the Rectification Engine and its followers will.

Nowhere to Run. The Rectification Engine sits at the heart of the Sanctum of the Divine Apparatus, a magnificent glass-domed temple. It is mostly immobile, although it does have the power to levitate and propel itself through the air over short distances. It relies on Cellanyr and the inquisition to carry out its mandates on its behalf. It supports them by manufacturing **purifiers**, tiny flying constructs powered by motes of divine energy.

The Rectification Engine has made little effort to fortify its sanctum: It thinks in moral terms, not practical ones, and can't fathom that anyone would ever disagree with the results of its calculations.

Cruel, Only to Be Kind. The Rectification Engine hasn't considered the possibility that its unsparing approach might be cruel and unjust. Nor is it questioned by Cellanyr and her subordinates, who carry out the apparatus's directives without hesitation. They reason that such extreme measures must be justified because of the Engine's own perfection. If people simply recognized their failings and steered themselves back toward the path of righteousness, there'd be no need for the inquisitors to intervene. The fact that the inquisition's victims haven't done so proves their irredeemability in the sect's eyes.

Initially, the inquisitors were a liberating force in lands where lawlessness and brutality reigned. Now, though, they've gone on to meddle in more orderly lands that they consider insufficiently benevolent—and in more benevolent lands that they consider insufficiently well-ordered. Even with the inquisition's spread, The Rectification Engine won't be satisfied until the whole world is perfectly perfect in every way, and it is willing to do whatever it takes to achieve its impossible goal.

Roleplaying the Rectification Engine

The Rectification Engine's telepathic voice sounds like an androgynous speaker of a creature's native language, employing the highest-status tone and most refined grammar. The Engine is formal but curt and does not waste words on pleasantries.

The Engine's views are rigid and inflexible. It takes an impersonal stance as if its moral judgments were observable facts that should be plain to anyone rather than an opinion. It addresses disagreements as misapprehensions that need to be corrected. Even with those who haven't said a word against it, there can be an undercurrent of impatience in its telepathic communications.

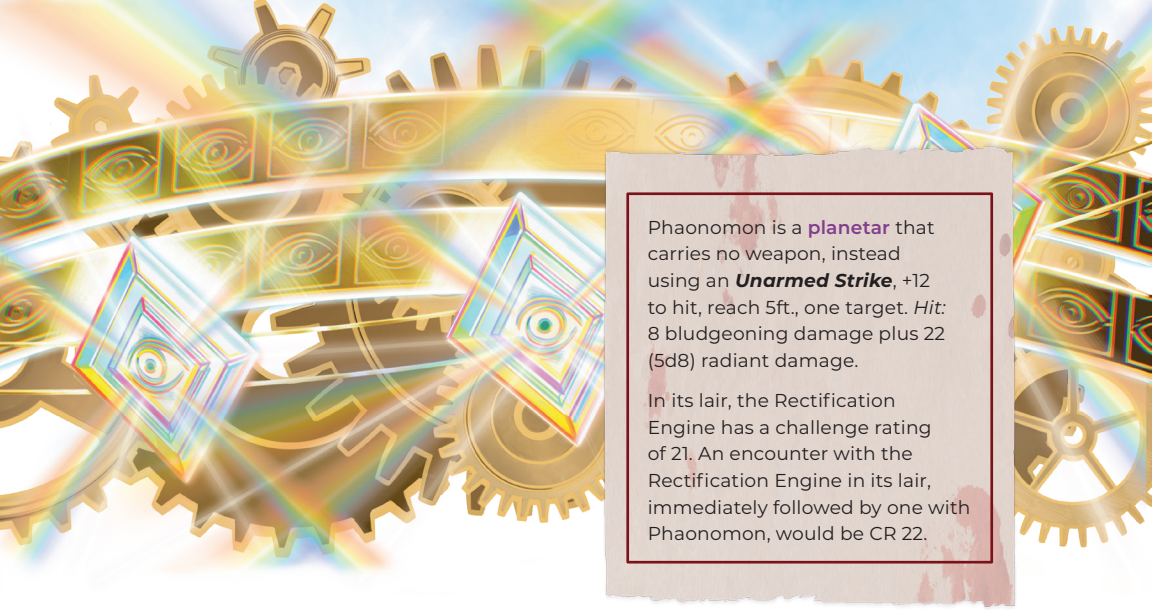
Its attitude toward those it judges morally flawed is stern, unsympathetic, and condescending. If anyone tries to convince it that its approach to improving the world is wrong —or, worse, dares to imply that it has elevated the wrong virtues altogether—its eyes shift around angrily, and it declares its critics' opinions unworthy of further attention. Calling out its irrationality provokes it into attacking.

The Rectification Engine's Tactics

The Rectification Engine isn't a strategic thinker. It treats combat as a continuation of its divine mission to rid the world of injustice and cruelty, focusing its wrath on those it believes are the most morally flawed.

The Engine assesses its foes' weaknesses, then targets them with rays of power through an ever-shifting array of crystal eyes on tracks and gimbals. It aims direct damage at those it abhors most, using other effects to hinder those who try to help them. Lacking physical weapons, it deals with melee attackers first by delivering a severe electric shock, then by levitating out of their reach. As it takes damage and its systems fail, the Engine adapts as best it can. When it can no longer deal direct damage, it resorts to insults. It is reluctant to leave its temple and the defenses it provides.

Destroying the Rectification Engine releases Phaonomon, the bound planetar that animates it. Phaonomon continues to fight. If they take serious damage, they flee skyward. However, once they are freed from the mechanical rigidity of the Rectification Engine, Phaonomon can be persuaded to stand down and repent by a well-reasoned appeal to their values.



Phaonomon is a **planetar** that carries no weapon, instead using an ***Unarmed Strike***, +12 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 bludgeoning damage plus 22 (5d8) radiant damage.

In its lair, the Rectification Engine has a challenge rating of 21. An encounter with the Rectification Engine in its lair, immediately followed by one with Phaonomon, would be CR 22.

The Rectification Engine's Traits

Ideal. "Justice and benevolence are more important than anything. Those who fail to live up to these ideals must be destroyed."
Bond. "My creator was a paragon, by whose perfection I measure everyone else."
Flaw. "I cannot see myself as anything but rational and correct."

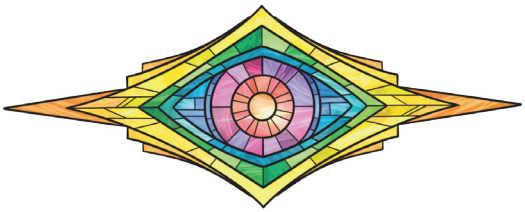
Adventure Hooks

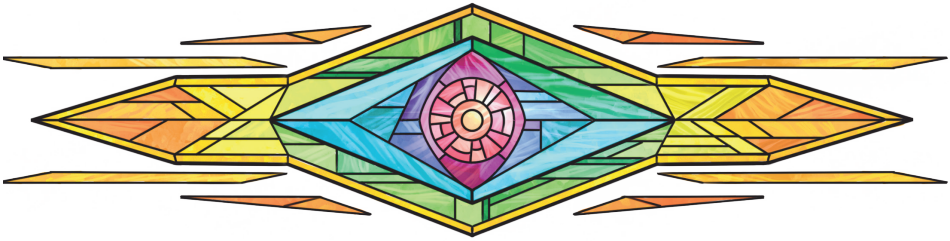
Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include the Rectification Engine in your campaign.

Injustice Compounded. In Lowhold, market day is also shakedown day, as city guards extort struggling merchants. Inquisition wardens (**cult fanatics** who wield clubs instead of daggers and whose *inflict wounds* spells deal radiant rather than necrotic damage) arrive to end the racket, accompanied by **purifiers** that blast away at the crooked guards. Several market stalls are set aflame, and their owners want compensation. They offer a 10 percent reward to anyone who can make the inquisition pay.

Summary Justice. In the normally easygoing city of Gladfri, vigilante patrols of inquisitors (**priests** with the spells *command* and *hold person* instead of *sanctuary* and *lesser restoration*) accompanied by squadrons of **purifiers** have begun punishing violators of their dogma, disrupting the Gladfriers' slow but effective restorative justice system. Gladfriers want the inquisition gone, but they fear the damage the purifiers might do or that resistance might draw more attention from the Rectification Engine itself.

A Worldly Power. The Rectification Engine has commanded **Cellanyr Zele** and her legion of inquisitors to cleanse the corruption from one of the most powerful mercantile kingdoms on the continent. But King Epaetio VI, a benevolent ruler who also wants corruption rooted out, has run out of patience with the inquisition's heavy-handedness. He's offering a lavish bounty to anyone who'll haul in the inquisition's leader, preferably alive, and end it once and for all.





The Sanctum of the Divine Apparatus

The temple that houses the Rectification Engine has two significant defenses: a *hallow* spell covering the 120-foot-wide, 60-foot-high domed central chamber where the apparatus sits; and a permanent *forbiddance* spell covering the 200-foot-square footprint of the sanctum, up to a height of 30 feet. The *forbiddance* spell deals radiant damage to fey, fiends, and undead; the *hallow* spell excludes the same creature types and renders all creatures within it, except celestials and constructs, vulnerable to radiant damage.

The Rectification Engine rests on the circular, seven-stepped dais at the center of the chamber it was constructed within. The sanctum has no doors large enough for the Engine to exit through. Should it need to flee, its only way out is to crash through the stained glass dome.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the Rectification Engine takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects. The Rectification Engine can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- A column of celestial radiance blasts down from above. Each creature in a 10-foot-radius, 40-foot-high cylinder centered on a point within 60 feet of the Rectification Engine must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. A target takes 7 (2d6) radiant damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.
- The Rectification Engine causes the ground to quake. The ground in a 20-foot radius around a point of its choice within its lair becomes difficult terrain. Each creature within the area that is concentrating on a spell or spell-like effect must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature loses concentration its concentration. In addition, each creature on the ground within the area must succeed on a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.
- Brilliant light shines through the glass dome of the sanctum upon one creature the Rectification Engine can see within it. The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by the Rectification Engine until initiative count 20 on the next round.

Regional Effects

The Rectification Engine's immense spiritual pressure creates one or more of the following effects in the region around its lair:

- The wind carries the faint sound of many voices singing in harmony within 7 miles of the sanctum.
- All natural illumination is intensified within 1 mile of the sanctum. The sun, moon, and stars all seem to shine more brightly, creating conditions of dim light at night, bright light at twilight and dawn, and a dazzling brilliance under daylight, which imposes disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.
- Trees, flowers, and other plants within 500 feet of the sanctum are lush and vigorous, and they grow naturally in neatly ordered rows.

If the Rectification Engine is destroyed, these effects end immediately, and any new vegetation in the area grows in a normal, ungoverned manner.

CELLANYR ZELE

Medium humanoid (human), lawful good

Armor Class 17 (breastplate, shield)
Hit Points 210 (28d8 + 84)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Int +8, Wis +9, Cha +8

Skills Insight +9, Investigation +8, Religion +8

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Celestial

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Special Equipment. Cellanyr wields an *inquisitor's mace**.

Enhanced Interrogation. Cellanyr's melee weapon attacks deal an extra 7 (2d6) psychic damage and 7 (2d6) radiant damage on a hit (included in her attack).

Immediate Compliance (3/Day). Cellanyr can use a bonus action to cast any enchantment spell of 1st level or higher she has prepared that normally has a casting time of 1 action.

Spellcasting. Cellanyr is a 14th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). Cellanyr has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *command,*^ *cure wounds, detect evil and good, guiding bolt*

2nd level (3 slots): *hold person,*^ *scorching ray, zone of truth*^

3rd level (3 slots): *clairvoyance, daylight, slow, spirit guardians*

4th level (3 slots): *compulsion, locate creature*

5th level (2 slots): *commune, dominate person, flame strike*

6th level (1 slot): *true seeing*

7th level (1 slot): *fire storm*

^ Enchantment spell of 1st level or higher with a casting time of 1 action

Actions

Multiattack. Cellanyr attacks twice with her *inquisitor's mace**.

Inquisitor's Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) psychic damage and 7 (2d6) radiant damage.

Radiance of the Dawn (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). Any magical darkness within 30 feet of Cellanyr is dispelled, and each hostile creature within 30 feet of Cellanyr who can see her must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 23 (2d10 + 12) radiant damage on a failed saving throw or half as much damage on a success. Cellanyr must be able to present her holy symbol to take this action.

Voice of the Inquisitor (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). Cellanyr presents her holy symbol and targets any number of creatures her choice within 30 feet of her that can see or hear her. Each target must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by her until the end of its next turn or until it takes damage. Targets charmed in this way drop whatever they are holding.

PURIFIER

Tiny construct, lawful good

Armor Class	17 (natural armor)
Hit Points	24 (7d4 + 7)
Speed	10 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4 (−3)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	1 (−5)	14 (+2)	1 (−5)

Skills Insight +4, Perception +4

Damage Resistances radiant

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages understands Common and Celestial but can't speak

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Celestial Nature. The purifier is affected by spells and magical effects that affect celestials.

Innate Spellcasting. The purifier's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *detect evil and good, detect thoughts, protection from evil and good*

Actions

Purify. *Ranged Weapon Attack.* +6 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) fire damage plus 4 (1d8) radiant damage, and if the target is a flammable object that isn't being worn or carried, it is ignited.

Inquisitor's Mace

Weapon (mace), very rare (requires attunement by a cleric or paladin)

You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

The mace has 5 charges. While holding it, you can use an action to expend 1 or more of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it: *daylight* (1 charge), *detect thoughts* (1 charge), *suggestion* (1 charge), *tongues* (1 charge), *flame strike* (3 charges), *scrying* (3 charges), *mass suggestion* (5 charges), *sunbeam* (5 charges).

The mace regains 1d4 + 1 expended charge daily at dawn. If the mace is reduced to 0 charges, roll a d20. On a 1, the mace becomes an ordinary, nonmagical weapon.

Lawful Weapon. A non-lawful creature trying to attune to the mace must succeed on a DC 18 Charisma check to attune to it.

RECTIFICATION ENGINE

CELESTIAL JUDGMENT MACHINE

Gargantuan construct, lawful good

Armor Class	23 (natural armor)
Hit Points	241 (21d20 + 21)
Speed	0 ft., fly 15 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	22 (+6)	25 (+7)

Saving Throws Wis +12, Cha +13

Skills Insight +12, Perception +12

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from non-magical weapons that aren't adamantine

Damage Immunities poison, radiant

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 22

Languages all except Abyssal and Infernal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 18 (20,000 XP)

Angelic Core. When the Engine is destroyed, the planetar Phaonomon is released.

Divine Awareness. The Engine knows if it hears a lie.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the Engine fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Modular Components. The Engine consists of seven modules surrounding its core. As it takes damage, its systems fail one by one, causing the following effects:

- At 206 hp or fewer, it can't use its Divine Sound.
- At 172 hp or fewer, it can't use its ground-quaking lair action.
- At 137 hp or fewer, it can't use its Focus Eye legendary action.
- At 103 hp or fewer, it can't use Launch Purifiers legendary action.
- At 68 hp or fewer, it can't fly. If it is in the air, it falls.
- At 34 hp or fewer, it can't use any of its legendary or lair actions.

Additionally, each time one of these systems fails, the Engine loses the ability to use one random Celestial Eye ray.

Slow-Moving. The Engine has disadvantage on Dexterity saving throws and automatically fails them if it can't fly.

Undimmable Light. Magical darkness can't be created within 100 feet of the Engine.

Innate Spellcasting. The Engine's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 21). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material or somatic components:

At will: *command, detect evil and good, detect thoughts, protection from evil and good*

3/day each: *commune, dispel evil and good, scrying, sending*

Actions

Multiattack. The Engine uses Awesome Presence. It then uses either its Celestial Eye or its Defensive Jolt.

Awesome Presence. The Engine emits a phantasmagoria of light through all its prismatic lenses and crystal eyes. Each creature of the Engine's choice that is within 120 feet of it and aware of it must succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or fall prone for 1 minute. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the creature is also incapacitated. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the Engine's Awesome Presence for the next 24 hours.

Celestial Eye. The Engine focuses a ray of celestial power through one of the following crystal eyes, targeting one creature it can see within 120 feet:

> **Eye of Regal Authority.** The target must make a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the Engine determines where the targeted creature moves and what action it takes on its next turn. The target can use its bonus action and reaction as normal.
>
> **Eye of Dazzling Splendor.** The target must succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or be stunned for 1 minute. The effect ends if the target takes any damage or if another creature uses an action to shake the target out of its reverie.
>
> **Eye of Harrowing Conscience.** The target must succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the target creature takes 16 (3d10) psychic damage and is incapacitated for 1 minute. On a successful save, the target creature takes half damage and is not incapacitated. An incapacitated target can repeat its saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success. Another creature that the target creature can hear and understand can use an action to talk the target creature out of its self-reproach, ending the condition on a successful DC 21 Charisma (Persuasion) check.
>
> **Eye of Cosmic Prescience.** The target must succeed on a DC 21 Intelligence saving throw. On a failed save, roll two d20s and record the numbers rolled. The Engine can use one of these rolls in place of one subsequent attack roll, saving throw, or ability check made by itself against the targeted creature or vice versa within the next hour.
>
> **Eye of Fearsome Discipline.** The target must succeed on a DC 21 Charisma saving throw or become frightened of the Engine for 1 minute. A frightened target can repeat its saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.
>
> **Eye of Spiritual Annihilation.** The target must make a DC 21 Constitution saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) psychic damage on a failure or half as much on a success.
>
> **Eye of Scouring Expurgation.** The target must succeed on a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw or take 17 (7d4) radiant damage. The target is disintegrated if this damage reduces it to 0 hit points.

Defensive Jolt. Each creature of the Engine's choice within 5 feet of it must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 10 (3d6) lightning damage and 10 (3d6) thunder damage and is knocked back 20 feet, landing prone. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage, isn't knocked back, and doesn't fall prone.

Divine Sound (3/Day). Each creature that can hear the Engine must make a DC 21 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, a creature is blinded and deafened for 1 minute. If a target fails this saving throw fails by 5 or more, it is also stunned. An affected target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Legendary Actions

The Engine can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Engine regains all spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The Engine makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Focus Eye. The Engine uses Celestial Eye.

Launch Purifiers (Costs 3 Actions). The Engine deploys 1d4 + 1 purifiers, which appear in unoccupied spaces adjacent to itself. They share the Engine's initiative count, acting immediately after the Engine.

REL'UM

BIG BAD BUREAU CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: CLASSIFIED	ALIAS: Ruler of the Rune
SIZE: Medium	TYPE: Undead
DANGER LEVEL: 22	DEMEANOR: More or Less Contained

WARNING:

IF SIGHTED, ACTIVATE WORLD BREAKER PROTOCOL

NOTES:

Rel'Um is what we at the Bureau call a Bigger Bad. If heroes have been doing their jobs, then we won't have to wrangle this ancient evil. However, the Magda situation is hot and needs constant attention to prevent Rel'Um's return. Should she emerge again, gods help us all.

-Chief Runcible Scowler

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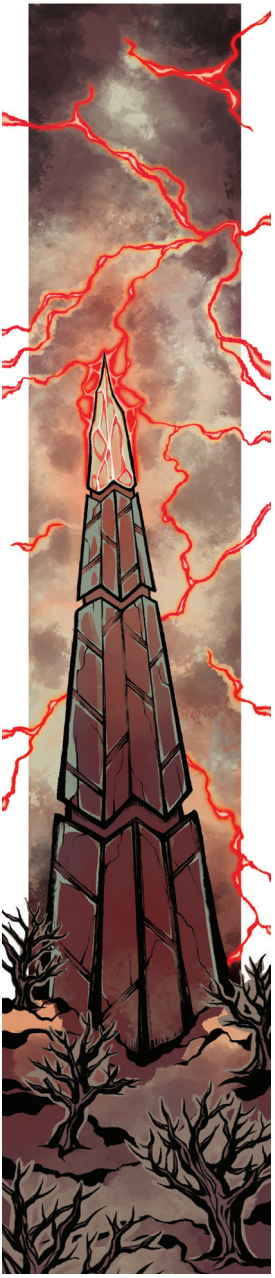


HER REIGN, YOUR RUIN

Rel'Um, Ruler of the Rune

Born a human gifted with powerful magic, **Rel'Um** has long since abandoned every trace of her mortality. Once the most powerful spellcaster of her age, she was sealed away in an accursed book called the *Red Rune**. From within the accursed book, Rel'Um has spent centuries consuming the souls of mages who attuned to the *Red Rune**. Finally, Rel'Um has found the perfect vessel to return to the world, a powerful elf named Magda.

Beginning and Betrayal. Centuries ago, when Rel'Um was born, magic was strictly governed by a hierarchy of archmages known as The Order of Magi. Initially, these mages both coveted and feared Rel'Um's immense magical gifts. They planned to mold her into a proper mage, educating her at their academy, where her power could be restricted within their rules.

Rel'Um made only one friend at the academy, a precocious and kind-hearted red dragonborn student named Talera. The two women bonded over their shared hatred for the restrictions placed on them by the Order. When Rel'Um finally grew powerful enough to break out of the academy, Talera followed her. For a while, the two were content to enjoy their freedom. However, Rel'Um could not resist the allure of researching increasingly dangerous arcane secrets.

Freedom to Rise. The Order of Magi's cruelty had left a deep impression on both young mages. In Rel'Um's eyes, less talented mages were beneath her, and those who lacked any magical talent were barely worth noticing at all. Meanwhile, Talera wanted to break the hierarchy so that every magic user could flourish in their own way without the stifling restrictions of the Order.

The two had many heated debates, but the final break in their relationship came when Rel'Um produced a fearsome minion she named a **gloomwrithe**. Talera was horrified to see that Rel'Um had captured and twisted souls to create this being. She pleaded with her friend to free the souls and end her experiments. Rel'Um turned away from Talera, accusing her of being yet another person trying to restrict her. The two went their separate ways, leaving Rel'Um convinced that the only way to be truly free was to stand alone.

Control and Conquest. Rel'Um abandoned her mortality as she continued to grow in power. She gathered armies of loyal soldiers, power-hungry apprentices, legions of undead horrors, and disciples who worshiped her as though she were a goddess. Rel'Um dismantled the Order of Magi's thirteen wizard-lords in stunning displays of arcane might. She sealed their souls into arcane constructs called the Guardians of Rel'Um, forcing her former masters to serve her instead.

Ritual and Reign. Rule over mortals was not enough for Rel'Um. She wanted to rule magic itself. She planned a ritual that would allow her to transcend the limits of her physical body and become an arcane force able to rewrite the rules of magic as she saw fit.

To enact her plan, Rel'Um built thirteen towers across the land. These imposing black spires, each topped with a gigantic pinnacle of solid opal, were the nodes of a magic circle that Rel'Um required to complete the Ritual of Ascension that would burn away her flesh, transforming her into a being of pure, unbridled magic.

Defeat and Imprisonment. As Rel'Um began to prepare for her ritual, the mighty towers she used to conduct it started twisting the world's magic. This drew the attention of Rel'um's former friend, Talera. She knew exactly what Rel'Um was planning, as they had discussed it long ago as a hypothetical. Talera had never believed that Rel'Um would actually attempt such a sweeping plan but now knew she could not ignore her old friend's despotic acts any longer. Talera teleported to the altar in the center of the towers. She cried out, trying to appeal to the person she had once known. Re'Um only laughed and attacked. The two clashed in a fearsome display of magic. Though Talera had developed immense magical power, too, Rel'Um's was still far greater. In a last attempt to prevent her old friend from destroying magic as the world knew it, Talera sacrificed herself to turn Rel'Um's ritual against her. Talera fused her soul with her own spellbook and trapped Rel'Um inside it, creating the *Red Rune**.

Within The Red Rune. Through the centuries, the *Red Rune** has passed from mage to mage. Those the *Red Rune** attracted were often outcasts, and Rel'Um appealed to them with false promises of righting the wrongs they suffered. Though the *Red Rune** gave these magic users a fraction of Rel'Um's power, in exchange, Rel'Um was absorbing their souls to fuel her eventual escape from the book.

A Worthy Vessel. Rel'Um has often tried and failed to inhabit the body of a mage attuned to the *Red Rune**, but her immense arcane power burned their flesh to ashes each time. Eventually, the *Red Rune** ended up in the archives of the Sixsmith Academy. There, Rel'Um sensed the prodigy, **Magda**.

Magda's gifts were at least as strong as Rel'Um's, if not even greater. Magda had suffered deep personal tragedy and yearned for the power to undo it. Rel'Um knew just how to manipulate the studious young elf and soon had her believing that they were two halves of the same soul. In helping Magda slake her thirst for vengeance against the pirates who murdered her twin sister, Rel'Um sought to trick Magda into performing the rite of her rebirth.

Reign of Rel'Um. Once Rel'Um took control of Magda's body, she shoved the elf's soul deep within the prison of the *Red Rune** that she had endured for so long. Though she can still feel Magda's soul fighting her, Rel'Um is confident she can keep the elf under control until she has completed her Ritual of Ascension and no longer needs a host body. Possessing Magda is both a boon and a bane for Rel-Um, who can draw on Magda's immense power, but also must fend off the elf's attempts to regain control of the body they share. Though Rel'Um works hard to maintain the illusion that she is in total control, in truth, Magda is on the verge of reclaiming her body. This fight for control slows Rel'Um's reflexes as she must spend considerable energy suppressing Magda. If Rel'Um were to wield her full power, she would give Magda an opportunity to wrench back control.

Magda Confined

Roleplaying Rel'Um

Supremely poised, Rel'Um carries herself with the confidence of a being who has built and outlived empires. She is insightful and can quickly assess what motivates or drives people apart. She is also cold and cruel. Rel'Um views others only as pawns or as raw materials for her ritual. Despite her uncaring disposition, Rel'Um is still intensely curious about the world and respects those with keen minds and strong magical talents. She may offer to spare spellcasters if they agree to serve her faithfully. However, Rel'Um will not tolerate resistance, and she would rather destroy a promising mage than put her plans at risk.

Rel'Um's Tactics

Through the eyes of Magda and other carriers of the *Red Rune**, Rel'Um has watched the forces that have risen since her imprisonment. If the party has gained any renown or tangled with Magda in the past, Rel'Um knows of them. Rel'Um will actively monitor their activities through divination magic and by capturing and interrogating their most trusted confidants.

Rel'Um prefers to leave combat to her minions while she focuses on obtaining enough souls for her final ritual. If forced to fight, her goal is to isolate party members, using disruptive spells to break their teamwork and leave them unable to help each other.

Magda's efforts allowed Rel'Um to inherit a sizable cult of followers called the Rel'Um'Kin. These **cultists** and **cult fanatics** worship her as a goddess. Among the Rel'Um'Kin, she prizes assassins she can direct toward her enemies and **archmages** who consider themselves her disciples. Rel'Um also commands any of the thirteen **Guardians of Rel'Um** that remain in the world. Now that she has returned, each Guardian has become stronger (using the stat block of a **shield guardian**. While Magda stored spells in the Guardians to increase their defense, Rel'Um prefers to equip her Guardians with spells that can deal massive damage.

Rel'Um's Traits

Ideal. "Rules are for other people."

Bond. "Once I control the world's magic, I will finally be truly free."

Flaw. "Attachments make you weak; I can only rely on myself."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Rel'Um in your campaign.

She's Back. A local **noble** tasks the party with investigating an army of undead recently sighted marching toward one of the ominous towers that dot the region. The horde is being led Rel'Um in Magda's body.

Empty Houses. The party arrives in a town where every resident has suddenly died. There is no damage to any of the buildings. The bodies are shriveled and lie around town with no signs of struggle. The culprits are a pair of **gloomwrithes** that still lurk in the town.

Magda's Doom. If the party is facing down Magda, Rel'Um takes control of the elf's body at a critical moment. Now the party must contend with Rel'Um and decide whether to work to free Magda or not.

Sea of Souls

Rel'Um's soul remains tethered to the *Red Rune** and is partially trapped within a demiplane inside the artifact. The demiplane within the Rune appears as a storm-tossed coast of a wide dark sea made from screaming souls. The rocky shore is made of red rocks, the last vestiges of Talera's sacrifice. The winds here are impossibly strong, and the rain is so thick it hampers movement. The purple clouds above crackle with lightning.

Rel'Um can only truly be destroyed if she is killed within this demiplane. Here, she appears as a monstrous being made from crackling red energy. When encountered here, Rel'Um uses the statistics of a **kraken** with the following alterations:

- She retains her Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores.
- She retains her Intelligence and Wisdom saving throws.
- She retains her languages and ability to speak.
- She retains her Red Lightning attack.

While Rel'Um possesses her body, Magda is imprisoned within the Red Run. Magda wants her body back and is willing to do whatever it take back control. When first encountered inside the demiplane, Magda is trapped inside a red crystal prison (AC 18; 30 HP; immunity to psychic and poison damage; resistance to all other damage types).

Inside the *Red Rune**, **Magda** uses her normal statistics with the following alterations:

- She loses her ***Special Equipment***, ***Aura of Rel'Um***, and ***Innate Spellcasting*** traits.
- She can't take Legendary Actions.

Tortured Souls

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Rel'Um can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects. Rel'Um can't take the same lair action two rounds in a row.

- Rel'Um reaches into the sea of souls to craft a **gloomwrithe** that appears in an unoccupied space within 30 feet of her. Roll initiative for the gloomwrithe as normal. Rel'Um can't use this lair action again until the gloomwrithe is destroyed.
- Rel'Um commands the sea of souls to lash out with ethereal grasping limbs. Until initiative count 20 on the next round, the area within 60 feet of Rel'Um becomes difficult terrain. Each creature other than Rel'Um that moves through the difficult terrain takes 9 (2d8) points of necrotic damage for every 5 feet it travels.
- Rel'Um forms a crystalline prison around a creature she can see within 60 feet of her. The creature must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or become imprisoned inside a Large red crystal. An imprisoned creature is restrained and can't affect anything outside its crystal prison. The prison can be attacked from the outside or inside (AC 18; 30 HP; immunity to psychic and poison damage; resistance to all other damage types). Shattering the prison frees the imprisoned creature.

Red Rune

Wondrous Item, artifact (requires attunement by a sorcerer, warlock, or wizard)

The *Red Rune** is a spellbook and prison of the ancient magic user Rel'Um. The lattice of veins on its cover pulse with arcane power.

Lure of the Rune. Your choice of either your Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma score increases by 2, and another of these scores increases by 1. These increases are up to a maximum of 20.

While you carry the *Red Rune**, you gain the following benefits:

Aura of Power. Creatures within 30 feet of you make saving throws against your spells with disadvantage.

Guardian Control. The **Guardians of Rel'Um** obey your spoken commands.

Tower Teleportation. As an action, you can *teleport* to one of Rel'Um's towers.

Destroying the Book. The *Red Rune** can only be destroyed by entering the demiplane within it using a *plane shift* spell or similar magic and killing **Rel'Um** there. If Rel'Um is killed, all other creatures, including souls trapped within, are expelled from the book. Living creatures appear in an unoccupied space adjacent to the book. Souls return to their bodies if they still exist. The book then shrivels up and is destroyed.

Curse. If you die while attuned to the *Red Rune**, your soul becomes trapped inside its demiplane. Unless the book is destroyed, you can't be resurrected by any magic save for a *wish* spell.

GLOOMWRITHE

Large undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18
Hit Points 225 (18d10 + 126)
Speed 40 ft., 60 ft. fly (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	27 (+8)	25 (+7)	9 (–1)	17 (+3)	23 (+6)

Saving Throws Str +12, Con +12, Cha +11

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, necrotic, poison, psychic, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Understands all languages known by the souls which comprise it, but can't speak

Challenge 16 (15,000 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The gloomwrithe can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Magic Resistance. The gloomwrithe has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

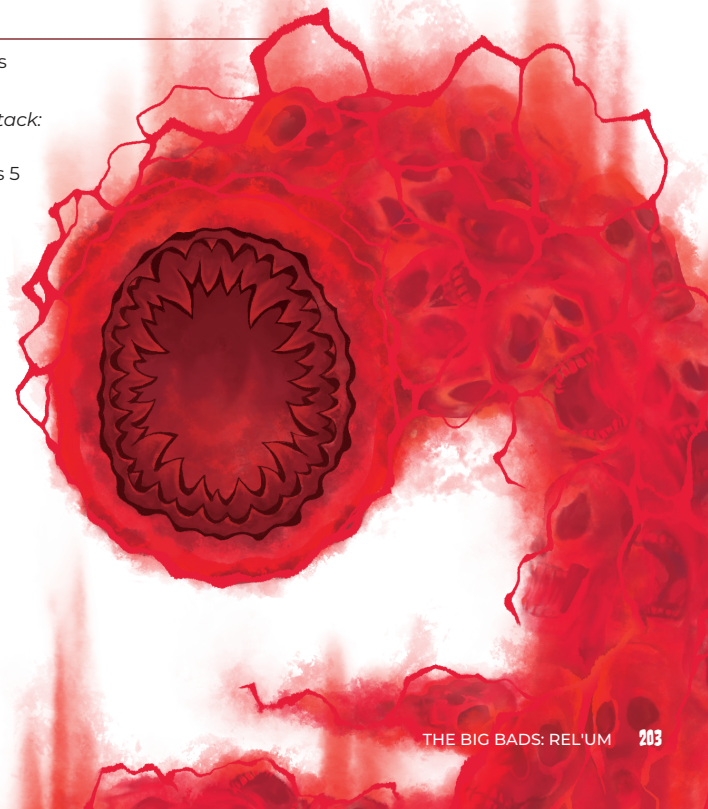
Turn Resistance. The gloomwrithe has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

Actions

Multiattack. The gloomwrithe makes three Withering Fangs attacks.

Withering Fangs. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) necrotic damage plus 5 (1d10) cold damage.

Soul Feast (Recharge 5–6). The gloomwrithe inhales the souls in a 60-foot cone. Each living creature within the area must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw, taking 58 (13d8) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The gloomwrithe regains a number of hit points equal to half the damage roll. Creatures killed by this damage are absorbed into the gloomwrithe and can't be resurrected unless the gloomwrithe is killed.



REL'UM

RULER OF THE RUNE

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class	20 (arcane wards)
Hit Points	187 (28d8 + 56)
Speed	30 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	22 (+6)	19 (+4)	22 (+6)

Saving Throws Con +9, Int +13, Wis +11

Skills Arcana +20, History +13, Insight +13, Perception +11

Damage Resistances cold, fire, force, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from magical weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, exhaustion, poisoned, paralyzed, petrified, stunned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 21

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Elvish, Dwarvish, Infernal, Primordial, Sylvan

Challenge 22 (41,000 XP)

Special Equipment. Rel'Um carries the *Red Rune** and is attuned to it.

Arcane Wards. Rel'Um has advantage on saving throws to resist spells and other magical effects, and is immune to any spell or effect that would alter her form. She adds her Intelligence modifier as a bonus to her armor class (already included in her stat block).

Divided Attention. When Rel'Um loses concentration on a spell due to taking damage, she must make a DC 16 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, she becomes incapacitated until the end of her next turn as she battles for control with Magda.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Rel'Um fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Rune's Prisoner. If Rel'Um is killed, her spirit returns to its prison within the *Red Rune** and Magda regains control of her body with 0 hit points.

Turn Immunity. Rel'Um is immune to effects that turn undead.

Spellcasting. Rel'Um is a 20th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 20, +12 to hit with spell attacks). Rel'Um has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, mage hand, minor illusion, ray of frost*

1st level (4 slots): *magic missile, shield, thunderwave, hellish rebuke*

2nd level (3 slots): *alter self, detect thoughts, mirror image, misty step*

3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse, counterspell, dispel magic, fireball*

4th level (3 slots): *blight, resilient sphere*

5th level (3 slots): *arcane hand, cone of cold, scrying*

6th level (2 slots): *disintegrate, globe of invulnerability, true seeing*^

7th level (2 slots): *finger of death, forcecage*

8th level (1 slot): *antimagic field, dominate monster*

9th level (1 slot)**:** *meteor swarm, time stop*

^Rel'Um casts this spell on herself before combat.

Actions

Red Lightning. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +12 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (27 6d6 + 6) lightning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 20 Charisma saving throw or be charmed by Rel'Um until the end of its next turn.

Soul Siphon. *Melee Spell Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one humanoid creature. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) necrotic damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 20). Rel'Um must maintain concentration as if on a spell or this grapple end. At the start of its turn a grappled target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 10 (3d6) necrotic damage and gain a level of exhaustion. If this effect kills a target, its soul consumed by Rel'Um, who regains 33 (6d10) hit points. A creature killed in this way can't be resurrected by any magic other than *wish*. Rel'Um can only grapple one creature at a time and can't cast spells with somatic components while grappling.

Reactions

Spell Reversal (3/Day). When Rel'Um is targeted by a spell, she can make an Intelligence check opposed by a spellcasting ability check from the caster. If she succeeds, Rel'Um causes the spell to target the caster instead.

Legendary Actions

Rel'Um can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Rel'Um regains all spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Spell Attack. Rel'Um casts a cantrip or uses her Red Lightning attack.

Teleport (Costs 2 Actions). Rel'Um magically teleports, along with any equipment she is wearing or carrying and any creature she is grappling, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space she can see.

Disrupt Souls (Costs 3 Actions). Each living creature within 20 feet of Rel'Um must make a DC 19 Constitution saving throw against this magic, taking 21 (6d6) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. On a failed saving throw, a creature has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks made until the end of its next turn.

SAEWYN

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: CLASSIFIED	ALIAS: Ocean Gate Guardian
SIZE: Large	TYPE: Elemental
DANGER LEVEL: 19	DEMEANOR: Deeply Blue

WARNING:

NO LIFEGUARD ON DUTY

NOTES:

Ah, poor Saewyn. Sometimes Big Bads are more like Big Sads. Even I get a little misty-eyed reading through this file.

-Chief Runcible Scowler

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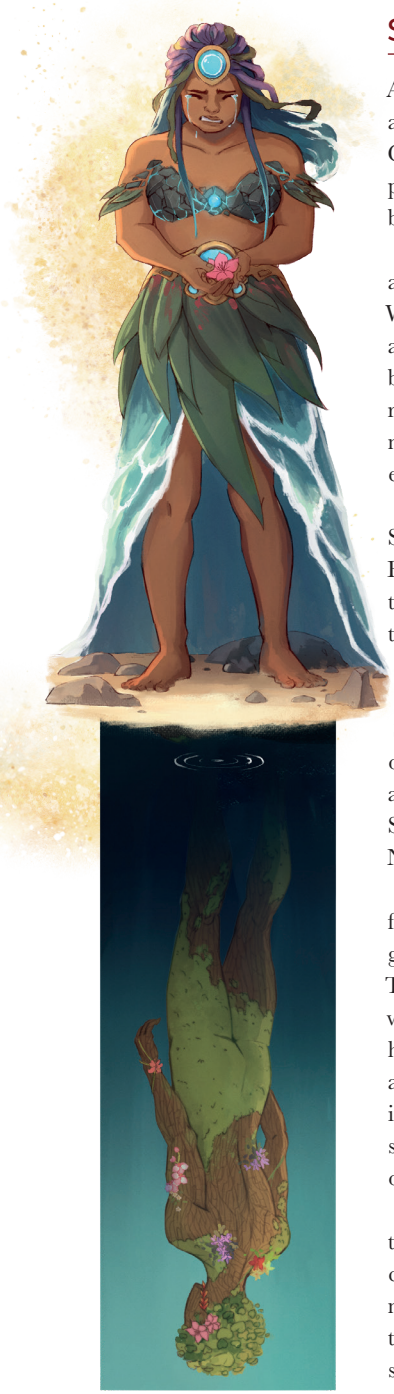
Writing & Game Design: Jess Go, Verity Lane
Original Cover: Lauren Walsh
Illustrations: Isabela Duffles



Saewyn, Ocean Gate Guardian

Among the islands of the Azure Archipelago floats an island that can't always be found when sought, home of **Saewyn**, the Ocean Gate Guardian. Inhabitants of nearby islands once told of her kindness and protection. However, recently the tales have darkened as Saewyn has brought a storm of destruction to the once tranquil seas.

Love Lost. Thousands of years ago, Saewyn's island home was attached to the mainland. Two elemental portals, one to the Plane of Water and one to the Plane of Earth, lay in a cave guarded by Saewyn and the volcanic spirit Kazanka. Nearby, a lush rainforest was guarded by the nature spirit Bosa. Saewyn and Bosa had a centuries-long romance. Visitors to the forest or the shore could often hear a beautiful melody as the voices of the two guardian spirits combined into an expression of their devotion.

However, arrogant Kazanka was jealous of their love. He wanted Saewyn's beauty for himself and felt she would never love him while Bosa was around. Kazanka drew on the molten power from beneath the earth to split himself and Saewyn away from the mainland, forming the floating island.

Fire and Water. While Saewyn can be cool and calm, she also has the capacity for terrible violence. Realizing what he had done, Saewyn turned her tempestuous wrath on Kazanka. When the heat of their battle cooled, the volcano spirit lay dormant. This left Saewyn adrift on an island far from her beloved. Without Kazanka's power, Saweyn had no way to return her new island home to the mainland. Now the island drifts aimlessly, and Saewyn pines for her lost love.

Sundered Duet. While Saewyn was distraught at being separated from Bosa, she could not stray far from the new island as she had to guard the Ocean Gate. She did her duty faithfully for many centuries. These were peaceful days but filled with longing for Saewyn as she wandered the beaches of her island, singing half of a song that should have been a duet. She collected pieces of driftwood from Bosa's forest, arranging them around the cave of the Ocean Gate. She found some joy in caring for the people of the Azure Archipelago, keeping their waters safe from pirates and entertaining children by letting them ride with her on the waves whenever her island drifted near enough to theirs.

Longing for her distant beloved, Saewyn used to fill any bottles that washed up on her shores with a little of her glittering sand before casting them back into the ocean. She hoped they would carry a message of her love to Bosa. These bottles of sand were once thought to bring good fortune. However, people have begun to call them cursed since the peaceful Saewyn's underwent a temepstuous transformation.

Calamitous Reunion. Saewyn's tranquil, lonely days came to an end one day when she sensed a feeling she had not felt since being separated from Bosa. She could feel their presence nearby. Saweyn rushed to investigate, surging forward as a powerful wall of water. Her heart leaped at the thought of being finally reunited with them.

DROWN IN SORROW

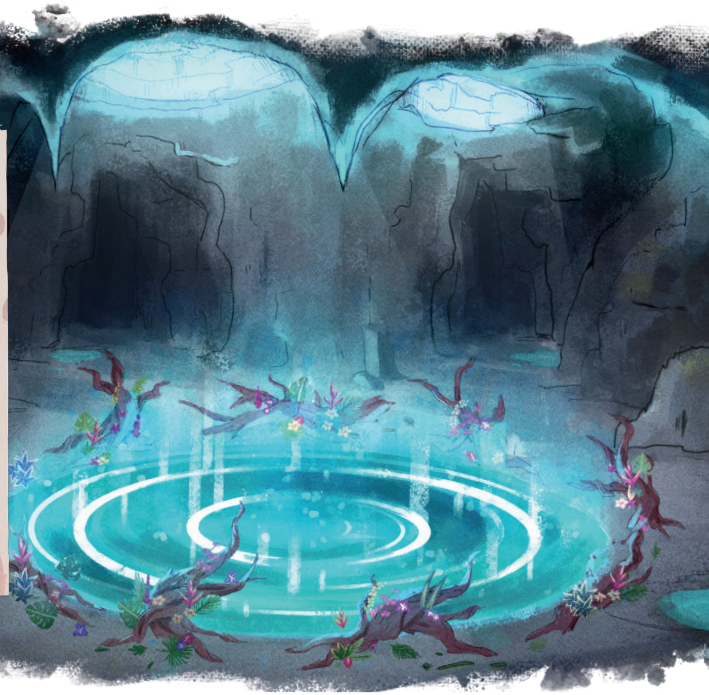
But as she drew near, she saw that it was not Bosa that crested the waves, but the corpses of their mighty trees, fashioned into warships. Far away, a new fleet had been constructed by order of a powerful warlord. The wood for these ships had been cut from Bosa's sacred forest.

Saewyn's temper flared. How dare these tiny humanoid creatures defile Bosa's beautiful domain and turn their peaceful trees into weapons of war? Saewyn knew that her gentle Bosa would have never allowed such a travesty while they lived. Her retribution was brutal. The sky turned dark, and the sea turned red with blood as Saewyn tore through the armada, splintering the ships and drowning sailors.

Storm of Heartbreak. Saewyn's wrath was not soothed by the destruction of one fleet. If humanoids had killed her beloved Bosa, then she would use every drop of her power to bring down a storm of devastation on all the peoples of the land. She has begun destroying any vessel that strays within range of her watery wrath. The joyful island communities of the Azure Archipelago that thought of Saewyn as a protector now fear the sight of her island floating into view on the horizon. No one in the nearby isles knows the cause of her sudden turn to violence. Some wonder if it is just her nature as an ocean spirit, for the sea is unpredictable and should never be underestimated. Fishers and traders fear to set out to sea. The people of the archipelago are suffering, often huddled inside their homes as another of Saewyn's fierce storms batters their islands.

Bosa and Kazanka. While Saewyn is convinced that Bosa is dead, in reality, they are not. Their forest and power have been diminished by the warlord's loggers, but they continue to guard their central sacred grove. Bosa is as heartbroken as Saewyn over their separation.

Meanwhile, Kazanka is beginning to stir from his centuries-long slumber. Adventurers on Saewyn's island may feel earth tremors as the volcano spirit starts to awaken. After his molten passion was cooled by Saewyn's torrents, Kazanka no longer wishes to court her. Should he awaken fully, he is scared of her and wishes to get as far away as possible, despite being tied to his duty as the island's mountain guardian.



The Ocean Gate

The Ocean Gate is a permanent portal to the Plane of Water located inside a cave within the island's volcano. The only way to reach the Ocean Gate is to swim under the island and through twisting underwater tunnels that finally emerge into the cave. Once the cave also held a portal to the elemental Plane of Earth, but with the defeat of Kazanka, it has cooled to an inactive disc of volcanic glass.

Roleplaying Saewyn

Saewyn's anger is fueled by an ocean of sadness. She is convinced that Bosa is dead and feels that if she had still been with them, she might have prevented the tragedy of their trees being turned into warships. While she does not resent that her duty as Ocean Gate Guardian has prevented her from following her heart, she does blame herself for not finding a way to get back to Bosa. While she is technically free to come and go as she pleases, Saewyn does not allow herself to stray more than twenty miles from her island and the portal she guards for fear of not properly defending it. Saewyn prevents any creature that might threaten the Plane of Water from entering the Ocean Gate. Above all else, Saewyn will defend the Ocean Gate, even at the cost of her own life.

Saewyn is not boastful or proud. She doesn't feel the need to impress other creatures. If she wishes to destroy something, she simply does so. As a sea spirit, remorse is not part of her nature. Even if she is calmed, Saewyn feels no more guilt for the destruction she has caused than a tidal wave would.

While her temper is raised, trying to convince Saewyn to relent is impossible. She will not listen to reason, threats, or entreaties. However, when she is calm, Saewyn is a gracious and thoughtful host to good-aligned creatures of all kinds.

Saewyn's Tactics

Saewyn typically appears in her humanoid form on her island. She attacks any humanoids that are not from an aquatic race. She gives particular violent attention to druids as she sees them as having failed to protect the balance of nature and allowed the destruction of Bosa. Destroying threats to the Ocean Gate will always be her first priority.

Saewyn at sea takes the form of a wall of water, reminiscent of a tidal wave. She directs her fury at ships and ports. In combat, Saewyn is brutal and direct, crashing against her enemies at full force and bringing down massive destruction indiscriminately. When her island drifts near enough, she will unleash her fury on the people of other islands in the form of a deadly tempest.

Saewyn's Traits

Ideal. "I am the ever-faithful guardian of the Ocean Gate."

Bond. "I cannot stray far from my duty on the island, but my heart belongs to Bosa. "

Flaw. "Once my temper is raised, trying to calm me is like trying to calm a hurricane."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Saewyn in your campaign:

Warlord's Revenge. The warlord Glaw has received reports of the mysterious water monster that caused the destruction of his new fleet. His spies have gathered intelligence that this monster is named Saewyn, along with the secret of how to reach her floating island using magical sand. Infuriated, Glaw is offering a huge reward of gems, gold, and weapons to any who can reach the island and destroy the monster Saewyn, freeing the people of the archipelago from her terrible storms.

Shipwrecked. While traveling, the adventurers' ship is sunk by a violent storm caused by Saewyn. They wash up on the beach of what seems at first like a tropical paradise, but it quickly becomes clear the island is not a safe refuge. Saewyn cannot stand creatures of the land setting foot on her shore and sets all of her powers and allies against them.

Love Letter Leaf. Bosa is aware of Saewyn's destruction of the fleet of ships made from their trees. Following the logging, they are greatly weakened, but the thought of their love being in such pain hurts them even more. Unable to leave their sacred grove, they ask a tapir to seek out those strong enough to brave Saewyn's fury and deliver to her a leaf containing a message that Bosa is alive and loves her still.

Saewyn's Island

Saewyn's island has no name and appears on no charts. Without Kazanka's power to guide its course, the island drifts with no apparent pattern. At the center of the island looms a volcano. The scars Kazanka created as he broke the island from the mainland have been completely covered by the lush forest growing on the mountain's volcanic soil. Kazanka slumbers, restrained in the walls of the cave of the Ocean Gate deep in the heart of the mountain.

The land flourishes with Saewyn's presence. The ocean water that laps upon the golden beaches is clean and clear. The sun is almost always shining. Much of the vegetation bears sweet fruit, and there are springs and streams of water that can refresh even the weariest travelers. It is a paradise, so long as you are welcome. However, when Saewyn is upset, these same delights turn deadly. The fruits turn sour, and the fresh water turns as salty as Saewyn's tears. The waves become rough, threatening to reach up and snatch unwary creatures from the beach and drag them down to drown.

Regional Effects

The island and surrounding waters are infused with Saewyn's power, causing one or more of the following effects:

- Driven by Saewyn's moods, the weather within ten miles of the island can change at a moment's notice. While she is angry, the weather is searingly hot. If creatures spend more than 1 hour in direct sunlight, they must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution save or suffer one level of exhaustion. For each subsequent hour they spend in the direct sunlight, they must repeat the check, and the DC increases by 5 for each check. If a creature has not drunk fresh water within the past hour, they make the check with disadvantage. Creatures who are resistant to fire damage make these checks with advantage, and creatures that are immune to fire damage automatically succeed.
- While Saewyn is happy, the fruit on her island functions like the berries created by goodberry. While she is unhappy, any creature who eats the fruit must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. Creatures who are resistant to poison make the check with advantage, and creatures immune to poison automatically succeed. On a failure, the creature has disadvantage on Constitution saving throws for the next 12 hours as their guts are wracked with spasms.
- While Saewyn is happy, gentle waves will deposit any creature that gets into trouble swimming offshore back onto the beach. While she is unhappy, waves may try to snatch creatures from the beach, requiring a successful DC 14 Dexterity saving throw to avoid being knocked prone and dragged up to 15 feet into the ocean.

Kazanka

Minions

All manner of **water elementals**, **giant crabs**, **merfolk,** and other aquatic creatures live in seas near Saewyn's floating island. While Saewyn's wrath has turned on the land, she still holds great affection for the creatures and people of the sea. Many sea creatures and aquatic humanoids revere Saewyn for her position as Ocean Gate Guardian.

The island's most fearless defenders are Saewyn's **sand soldiers.** These creatures form themselves out of beach sand and bravely stand guard despite their diminutive stature. Each one is clad with sand dollars, hermit crab shells, or other beach detritus, acting as armor. One sand soldier alone cannot do much, but they work together to courageously defend Saewyn's island.

Sand Soldier

Tiny construct, lawful neutral

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 7 (2d4 + 2)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (–1)	9 (–1)

Skills Perception +1

Damage Immunities piercing, bludgeoning

Senses tremorsense 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 11,

Languages understands Common, Aquan, and Terran, but cannot speak

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Beach Life. As long as there is sand on its beach, a defeated sand soldier will re-form each day at sunrise.

Sand Form. A sand soldier can share a space with up to three other sand soldiers and can pass through any space large enough to allow a grain of sand.

Actions

Sand Castle. While on a beach, the sand soldier builds a defensive castle from sand that fills a 5-foot cube in the space it occupies. Up to four sand soldiers can occupy the castle. While inside the castle, the sand soldiers gain +2 to their AC. The castle has an AC of 16, automatically fails saving throws, and is destroyed if it takes any damage.

Sand Slash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) slashing damage.

Sandstorm. When four sand soldiers share a space, they can work together to form a ferocious whirlwind of sand. Any hostile creature within 5 ft. of the sand storm must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until the end of their next turn. A creature that ends its turn within 5 feet of the sandstorm suffers 5 (2d4) bludgeoning damage. The sandstorm lasts until the start of the next round.

Saewyn's Sand

Wondrous item, very rare

This bottle contains 2d4 + 2 pinches of glittering golden sand. As an action you can toss a pinch of sand into the air. The sand will drift toward the current direction of Saewyn's island.

Curse. While Saewyn is enraged, this item is cursed. It draws the attention of her aquatic allies. Underwater beasts and humanoids have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks to detect you while you hold or carry the bottle of sand and are drawn to attack you.

SAEWYN

OCEAN GATE GUARDIAN

Large elemental, lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 200 (16d10 + 112)
Speed 30 ft., swim 120 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	18 (+4)	24 (+7)	17 (+3)	22 (+6)	25 (+7)

Saving Throws Str +13, Con +13, Wis +12

Skills Nature +12, Perception +12, Survival +12

Damage Resistances radiant, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from magical attacks

Damage Immunities fire, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 22

Languages Aquan, Celestial, Common, Sylvan, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 19 (22,000 XP)

Conductive. If Saewyn is hit by an attack that deals lightning damage, each creature within 10 feet of her takes half of the attack's lightning damage, and Saewyn takes none.

Shapeshifting. As a bonus action, Saewyn can change between her humanoid form and water form.

Siege Monster. Saewyn deals double damage to objects and structures.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Saewyn fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. Saewyn has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

One With The Sea. Saewyn has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks made to spot creatures in Coastal and Underwater terrain. While in Underwater terrain, Saewyn can hide as a bonus action and has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to do so.

Water Form. While in her water form, Saewyn can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. She can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing. Moving through Saewyn's water form is considered difficult terrain unless a creature has a swim speed.

Innate Spellcasting. Saewyn's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 21, +13 to hit with spell attacks). Saewyn can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *control water, create or destroy water, druidcraft, fog cloud, water breathing, water walk*

3/day each: *call lightning, control weather, conjure elemental (water only)*

1/day: *storm of vengeance*

Actions

Multiattack. Saewyn makes three slam attacks or two pounding waves attacks.

Pounding Waves (Water Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 20 ft., up to two targets within 5 feet of each other. *Hit:* 34 (6d8 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Slam (Humanoid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 25 (4d8 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Song of the Sea. Saewyn entreats listeners to enter her waters. Every humanoid within 150 feet of Saewyn that can hear her song must succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed until the song ends. Saewyn must use a bonus action on her subsequent turns to continue singing. She can stop singing at any time. The song also ends if Saewyn is incapacitated.

While charmed by Saewyn, a target is incapacitated and ignores the words of their allies. If the charmed target is not already submerged in water, they can only take the Dash action to attempt to get to deep water and try to submerge themselves. A creature charmed by her song must try to get as deep underwater as possible, but the spell ends if they begin drowning. Creatures will not move through dangerous terrain, such as a pit or lava, to reach water. Whenever they take damage from a source other than Saewyn, the target can repeat the saving throw. If the saving throw is successful, the charmed effect ends. If the target's saving throw is successful, the target is immune to Saewyn's song for the next 24 hours.

Reactions

Undertow. When a creature within 60 feet of Saewyn hits her with a ranged attack, Saewyn can use her reaction to send out a grasping surge of water at the creature, who must then make a successful DC 21 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone and dragged 20 feet directly towards Saewyn.

Legendary Actions

Saewyn can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Saewyn regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

All One Ocean. Saewyn draws on the mighty interconnected power of the seas. She regains 16 (3d10) hit points or 33 (6d10) hit points if immersed in the sea. Once Saewyn has used this ability, she must use one of her other legendary actions before using it again.

Attack. Saewyn uses her pounding waves or slam attack.

Ocean's Grasp (Costs 2 Actions) Saewyn targets a creature she can see that is within 60 feet of a body of water. The target must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or be magically swept up into a wave of water and lifted 20 feet in the air. The target is restrained until the end of the Saewyn's next turn. As the wave subsides, the target is dropped into the nearest unoccupied space beneath it, taking 20 feet of falling damage or no falling damage if Saewyn uses her reaction to let the target down gently.

SCULA

BIG BAD BUREAU CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 015	ALIAS: Twlight Terror
SIZE: Tiny	TYPE: Fey
DANGER LEVEL: 5	DEMEANOR: Confident Killer

WARNING:

WRONG GROVE, WRONG TIME

NOTES:

Good thing Scula is stuck in one place. Otherwise, we'd have trouble keeping tabs on this minuscule murderer. Like finding a very deadly needle in a haystack, if that needle could shoot to kill.

-Agent Minnie Koyama, Department of Minor Menaces

Concept: Ricardo Evangelho
Writing & Game Design: Charlotte Ashley, Ty Christensen
Original Cover: Jenn Ravenna Tran
Illustrations: Faith Schaffer

PREY YOU LIVE

A Shipwright's Tale

I implore you: seek the exiled faerie, for her quest is fraught with danger but is of utmost importance. It all began when I heard rumors of a glade where no beast dared to tread. Imagine my surprise when I easily found it, nestled in a valley of the Slate-Shale Mountains. It was a bit eerie, seeing a place where forest vegetation clearly thrived yet was completely unmarred by beasts. My attention was quickly drawn to the odd, softly glowing sigils carved into the trees, and while I lost myself studying them, twilight fell.

The poor fey lass—I think she said her name was Christobel—appeared in a twinkle of starlight, her diminutive yet wide eyes imploring my aid. She was a sprite from the Cat's Tail Marsh, a Heart Seer, she said. She explained that while journeying to Lake Grandeep to purify some sick water elementals, a particularly nasty one had stolen a family heirloom, a gold ring, and nearly drowned her. Her attempt to teleport away somehow locked her in this realm of twilight, only able to visit our world for a brief hour each day.

With the strength of her heirloom and its magic, she could be free and would be forever in my debt. She placed a small hand to my cheek and said she could feel the good in me, and she begged me to soften my heart. In a moment of unparalleled insight, she offered to use her magic to assist me in locating my son, for whom I've long searched since the tempest washed ashore the shattered remnants of his vessel, even though I hadn't mentioned him! At that point, I knew I had to try.

I tell you, I made my way to Lake Grandeep with every intent to vanquish the beast and procure the fair maiden's ring. But Lochmoor, that cursed elemental, drove me away with barely my life to show for my efforts. Since then, I've not made my way back to that twilit glade. I can barely stand the thought of my shame, having failed the faerie's earnest quest. Please, spread word of this lass's imprisonment, that perhaps one more skilled than I may free her.

The Tale of Josephus the Shipwright

Scula, Twilight Terror

Scula, Slayer Immaculate of the Slate-Shale Heights, was the pride of her people's hunters. Whether she hunted grubs for her kith's meals or vicious kobolds to protect her mountain village, Scula hunted the way a lover woos their heart's desire: with care, intensity, and devotion. A perfect kill was a moment of exaltation for the young fey Scula—a rush that left her bright-eyed and breathless for days. Nothing could compete with that feeling.

Deadly Deeds. Her village watched the obsession with concern, but none could deny her skill, and they desperately needed her assistance in defending their home and providing for their people. So they allowed her to advance through the ranks of hunters and warriors, though she never quite fit in with her peers.

The Heartseeker. One day she was given a gift from a mysterious source. Scula experienced a vision. A huge figure made of perfectly cut obsidian, with blue-white flames in his eyes, folded out of the mountain stone and called her name. He did not speak aloud, but wordlessly he communicated that he understood her skill as a hunter and her exaltation in a perfect kill. She knew he loved her for it and would reward her. She would be his champion, for he was the apotheosis of all she held sacred. When the vision ended, Scula discovered she carried a ring, and she somehow knew its name: *Bolzen the heartseeker**. Upon saying its name, the mysterious gift awoke to its true purpose as a weapon that would help her hunt like never before.

Quick and Dirty. Where once Scula could kill one, she could now kill five. Dangers on the border of the village were not just driven off but slaughtered. Travelers far from their village, no threat to the sprites of the Heights, were meticulously butchered.

Shortly thereafter, sprites from her village began to vanish under peculiar circumstances. Folk who perhaps had caused minor disturbances in the past, but who were not so very bad, started dropping like flies.

One day, Scula was caught red-handed murdering the village twigsmith in an ritualistic beheading, and she was swiftly overwhelmed. She could not fight back, for the fight was quick and dirty, and such brawls were not where her talents lay.

Scula instinctively protected Bolzen as she was pinned down. The elders of Slate-Shale Heights blamed the curse that had befallen Scula on the ring she clutched close. Their proud, if erratic, hunter had been twisted somehow by the ring, and they were quick to separate the two.

With an unwillingness to kill one of their own, the elders decided to trap Scula in a twilight prison and separate her from Bolzen forever.

Trapped in Twilight. Scula has been locked between worlds for fifteen years. The cleverest spell-shapers of her village imprisoned and cursed her to dwell outside of time. In a deep valley between the flat, gray peaks of her home, she can only visit our world for one hour each day, just as the last beam of sunlight begins to wink out and be replaced by utter darkness. In this twilit world, Scula finds herself unarmed, unarmored, and magically severed from her benefactor.

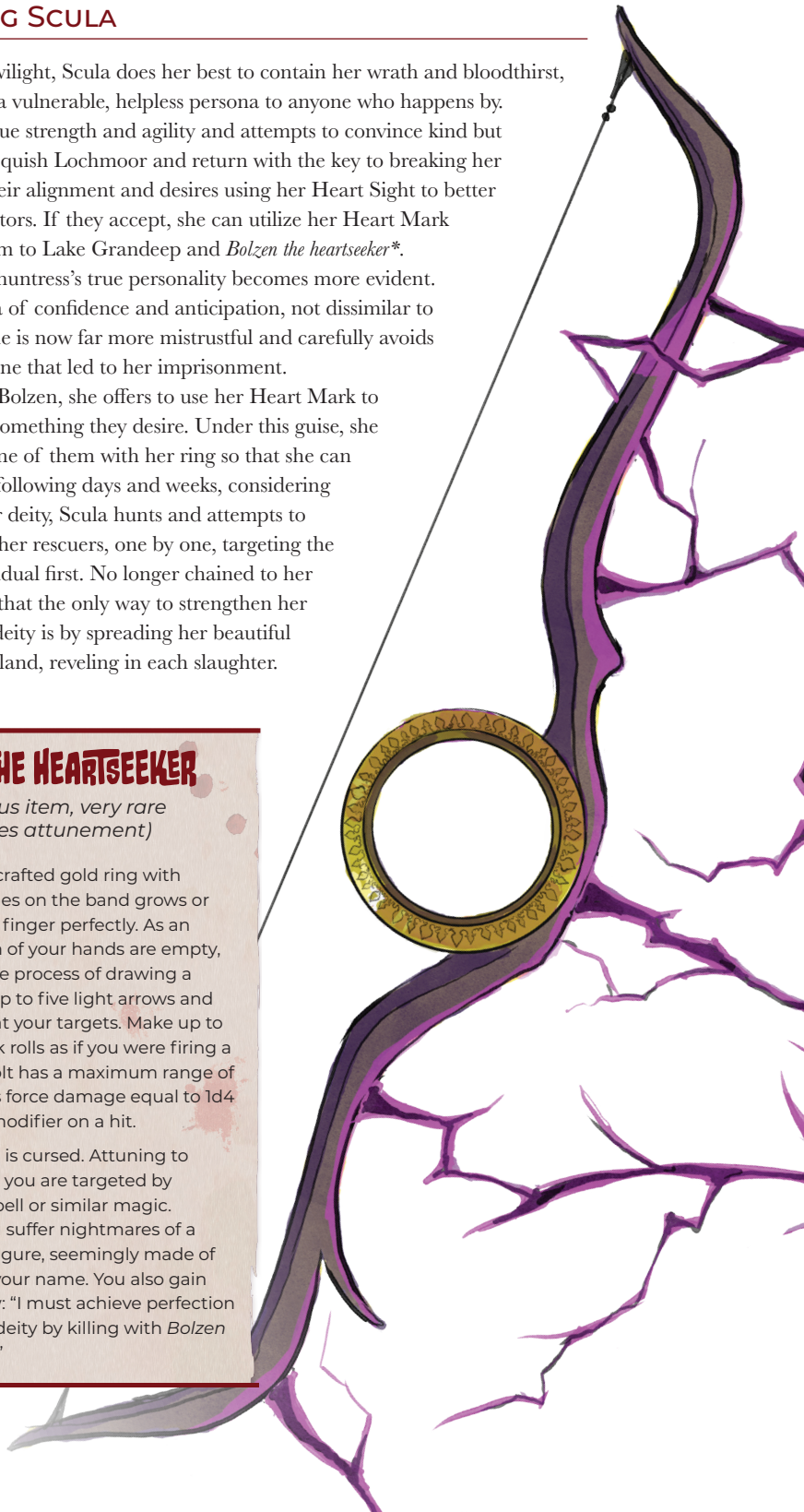
Scula understands that she can break free from her prison if she can reconnect to her mysterious divine patron. The key to their connection is her ring, Bolzen, taken during her capture. She has discovered that Bolzen was hidden at the bottom of Lake Grandeep, entrusted to a swamp elemental named **Lochmoor**. The lake is too far for her to reach during her hour of twilight, so she needs a surrogate to retrieve it. She tries to manipulate anyone who seems strong enough to defeat Lochmoor and kind enough to fall for her fabricated plea. She vehemently avoids any conflict until *Bolzen the heartseeker** is returned to her, to maintain her guise.

Roleplaying Scula

While trapped in twilight, Scula does her best to contain her wrath and bloodthirst, presenting instead a vulnerable, helpless persona to anyone who happens by. She conceals her true strength and agility and attempts to convince kind but naive heroes to vanquish Lochmoor and return with the key to breaking her curse. She reads their alignment and desires using her Heart Sight to better manipulate her visitors. If they accept, she can utilize her Heart Mark ability to guide them to Lake Grandeep and *Bolzen the heartseeker**.

Once freed, the huntress's true personality becomes more evident. She exudes an aura of confidence and anticipation, not dissimilar to a stalking feline. She is now far more mistrustful and carefully avoids situations like the one that led to her imprisonment.

If Scula regains Bolzen, she offers to use her Heart Mark to lead the heroes to something they desire. Under this guise, she also subtly pricks one of them with her ring so that she can track them. In the following days and weeks, considering it an offering to her deity, Scula hunts and attempts to ritually assassinate her rescuers, one by one, targeting the most isolated individual first. No longer chained to her grove, she believes that the only way to strengthen her connection to her deity is by spreading her beautiful carnage across the land, reveling in each slaughter.



Bolzen the Heartseeker

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

This small, finely crafted gold ring with five triangular holes on the band grows or shrinks to fit your finger perfectly. As an action, while both of your hands are empty, you can mimic the process of drawing a bow, producing up to five light arrows and launching them at your targets. Make up to five ranged attack rolls as if you were firing a longbow. Each bolt has a maximum range of 120 feet and deals force damage equal to 1d4 + your Dexterity modifier on a hit.

Cursed. This item is cursed. Attuning to it curses you until you are targeted by a *remove curse* spell or similar magic. While cursed, you suffer nightmares of a mountain-sized figure, seemingly made of obsidian, calling your name. You also gain the following flaw: "I must achieve perfection and glory for my deity by killing with *Bolzen the heartseeker**."

Scula's Tactics

The Twilight Terror is exceptionally patient. Scula knows her limits well and seeks always to achieve a perfect kill. With that end in mind, she utilizes her speed, teleportation ability, and stealth to stalk her prey and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. She strives to strike lone targets in isolated areas to draw out the pleasure of her butchery. Even so, her bloodthirst is never strong enough to overpower her patience as she obsessively pursues her kills.

On the rare occasion that she is drawn into open combat against multiple enemies, Scula attempts to swiftly end combat by decisively dispatching a wounded target so she can flee. She wields the arcane bolts of Bolzen to strike from a distance, taking full advantage of her flight and range to avoid hazards and prioritize her own safety. Once a target is downed and her and Bolzen's bloodlust is satisfied, she flees, awash in the blessed glory of her patron's pleasure.

Scula's Traits

Ideal. "Only the flawless performance of my body and mind can bring about the perfect kill and the ecstasy of my divine reward."

Bond. "Through Bolzen, my Heartseeker, am I bound to my master, and with his love, I am perfection."

Flaw. "Overconfidence in my skills is my downfall. Being brazen has gotten me caught before."

Adventure Hooks

Consider using the following scenarios if you wish to include Scula in your campaign:

The Fate of Sir Daenis. The village at the foot of the Slate-Shale Mountains is in mourning. The youngest son of their liege lord, a beautiful young man named Daenis of Dinorwig, has been missing now for a full season and is presumed taken by the faeries that populate the mountains. The Lady Dinorwig is willing to pay adventurers to follow the trail and retrieve her beloved Daenis.

The Heart-Seer. Traveling through the moors north of the Slate-Shale Mountains, parties may hear rumors of a mystical valley grove that hosts only a lone faerie exile who can see into your heart. Those who approach the shadowed grove may see glowing symbols in the moss and bark. Heroes who camp nearby may even receive a visit from Scula, whose impassioned pleas are said to inspire the most beautiful songs and poetry.

The Assassination of Wayfinder Goran. The characters hear of Goran, a ranger, who has been found brutally slain after several months of feverishly fleeing across the land. In truth, she freed Scula and was eventually caught by the sprite. Those who investigate her death learn of her previous quest to assist a fair fey lady.

Scula's Twilight Thicket

Every night, just as the last light winks out, Scula appears in her grove, able to interact with the world for exactly 1 hour, a condition necessary to ensure Scula's twilight prison can recharge for the next 23 hours of containment. Despite the wild nature of the Slate-Shale Mountains, the grove appears almost cultivated. The area is 120 feet across and is clear of trees, dotted with exposed slate boulders, and carpeted with mosses and moon-blooming wildflowers. No other creatures make their nests or dens here, driven away by the sprite mages to deprive Scula of easy prey.

Scula has carved three symbols into the trunks of trees at the edge of her grove: a stylized "D" with five lines perpendicular to the straight side representing Bolzen, a three-pronged crown with two rough "eyes" representing Lochmoor, and a diamond with an eye representing her Heart Sight.

Regional Effects

The sprite mages of the Slate-Shale Heights have enchanted Scula's Grove to keep her isolated and beyond the reach of Bolzen's curse. The area within the grove is under the following effects:

- A creature cannot see Scula's grove until it is within it. All that appears beyond each tree is more forest. There is no line of sight from the woods into the grove.
- Any dwellings, including tents, lean-tos, or other camps, fall to pieces if they are built within the grove. Knots come undone, and fires do not light. Earth immediately fills any holes that are dug.
- Any creature that attempts to stay overnight within the grove falls into a profound sleep that lasts from sunset until sunrise, and the creature awakes 2 miles away in a random direction.
- Any mundane objects made by mortal hands are gradually reclaimed by the earth if left unattended in the grove for more than 1 hour. Wood rots and erodes, metal becomes rusted and disintegrates. Within 12 hours, nothing but dust remains.

When Scula dies, these effects fade immediately.

Lochmoor, The Guardian of Lake Grandeep

Lochmoor is an ancient swamp elemental and has been an ally of the fey folk of Slate-Shale Heights for many years. Lochmoor has long been asked to guard many strange things on behalf of the village. Artifacts, valuable treasures, and now *Bolzen the heartseeker** have all been dragged down to the depths of Lake Grandeep and kept under Lochmoor's watchful eye. The elemental's loyalty to Slate-Shale Heights is unwavering, and it fights hard to keep its waterlogged hoard safe.

Lochmoor

Large elemental, neutral

Armor Class	14 (natural armor)
Hit Points	114 (12d10 + 48)
Speed	30 ft., swim 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	5 (−3)	10 (+0)	8 (−1)

Damage Resistances acid; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Aquan, Sylvan

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Sludge. If Lochmoor takes cold damage, it partially freezes and has vulnerability to thunder damage until the end of its next turn.

Water Form. Lochmoor can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. It can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Actions

Multiattack. Lochmoor makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Whelm (Recharge 4–6). Each creature in Lochmoor's space must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw. On a failure, the target takes 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If it is Large or smaller, it is also grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and unable to breathe unless it can breathe water. If the saving throw is successful, the target is pushed out of Lochmoor's space.

Lochmoor can grapple one Large creature or up to two Medium or smaller creatures at one time. At the start of each of Lochmoor's turns, each target grappled by it takes 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage. A creature within 5 feet of Lochmoor can pull a creature or object out of it by taking an action to make a DC 14 Strength check and succeeding.

SCULA

SLAYER IMMACULATE OF THE SLATE-SHALE HEIGHTS

Tiny fey, neutral evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 90 (20d4 + 40)
Speed 10 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (−4)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +7, Cha +6

Skills Deception +6, Perception +10, Stealth +8

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses passive Perception 20

Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Special Equipment. Scula is equipped with, *Bolzen the heartseeker**. Normally, the ring would shrink to fit the wearer's finger, but due to Scula's size, she uses the ring differently, wielding it while it remains sized to an average humanoid's finger. At will, she can have the ring grow the upper and lower limbs of a stringed bow, which she uses to fire Bolzen's magic projectiles.

Assassinate. Scula has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn in combat yet. In addition, any successful hit against a creature that is surprised is a critical hit.

Bolzen's Mark. When Scula is equipped with Bolzen, she has marked herself with a permanent, more powerful version of her own Heart Mark. Her mark glows when she is within 1,000 feet of the last creature damaged by *Bolzen*.

Euphoric Shot. When Scula is equipped with Bolzen, whenever Scula rolls a 20 on an attack roll or deals 20 or more damage in one turn, she becomes filled with divine euphoria. Her first attack on her next turn has a +10 to hit and deals an additional 5 (1d10) radiant damage.

Heart Mark. Scula can mark a creature with a symbol and tells them to describe or name an object that is familiar to them. They sense the general direction to the object's location. If the object is within 1,000 feet of the marked creature, the mark glows purple, intensifying the closer the object is. If the object is in motion, the creature knows the direction of its movement.

This ability can locate a specific object known to the creature as long as the creature has seen it up close—within 30 feet—at least once. Alternatively, the mark can locate the nearest object of a particular kind, such as a certain kind of apparel, jewelry, furniture, tool, or weapon.

Scula can maintain up to two Heart Marks at once, in addition to Bolzen's Mark.

Planned Shot. When Scula is equipped with Bolzen, if she does not move on her turn, she can target a specific place on her opponent with one of her ranged or melee attacks. This attack has disadvantage, but if it hits, the attack deals an additional 4 (1d8) piercing damage.

Actions

Multiattack. Scula makes five attacks with Bolzen or two attacks with her fey rapier.

Bolzen. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) force damage.

Fey Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) piercing damage.

Heart Sight. Scula touches a creature and magically learns its current emotional state. If the target fails a DC 15 Charisma saving throw, she also learns the target's alignment. If the target fails its saving throw by 5 or more, she also gains a sense of what the creature most longs for, such as love, family, home, candied plums, or wealth.

Invisibility. Scula magically turns invisible until she attacks or casts a spell, or until her concentration ends (as if concentrating on a spell). Any equipment she wears or carries is invisible with her.

Know Your Enemy. Scula studies a creature's weaknesses, granting her advantage on her next attack against it before the end of her next turn. If the attack hits, that creature suffers disadvantage on attack rolls until the start of her next turn.

Teleport (Recharge 6). Scula instantly teleports along with any equipment she is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space she can see.

Legendary Actions

Scula can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Scula regains all spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Teleport. Scula uses her Teleport action.

Invisibility (Costs 2 Actions). Scula uses her invisibility action.

Know Your Enemy (Costs 2 Actions). Scula uses her know your enemy action.

SHEN

BIG BAD BUREAU CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 021	ALIAS: Devious Deep Dweller
SIZE: Large	TYPE: Dragon
DANGER LEVEL: 3, 5, or 8	DEMEANOR: Playfully Tempestuous

WARNING:

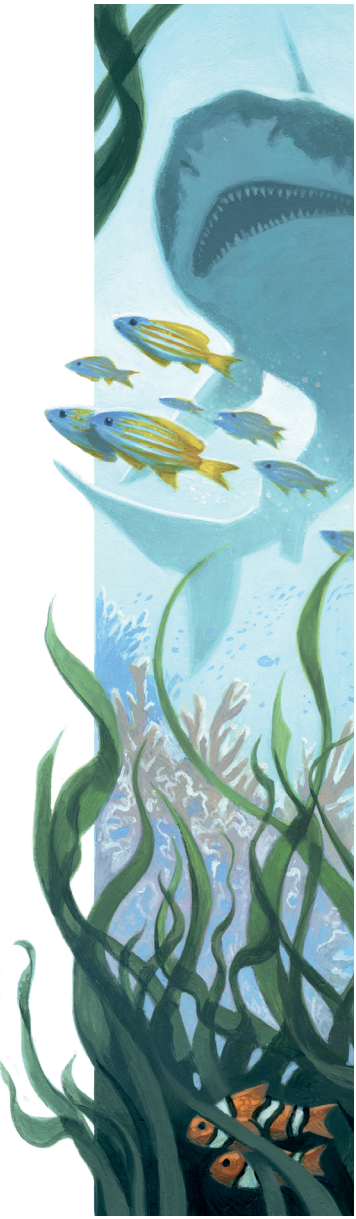
3 FOR 1 SEAFOOD SPECIAL

NOTES:

You never know which version of Shen you're going to encounter until you meet her. This slippery shapeshifting dragon can really clam-up or carp-on, depending on her mood.

-Captain Balsom Stelt, Department of Nautical Nasties

Concept: Kat Kruger
Writing & Game Design: Kat Kruger
Original Cover: Kathleen O'Hara
Illustrations: Alex Stone



THREE WAVES OF TROUBLE!

Shen, Devious Deep Dweller

Sightings and rumors abound of a mysterious underwater creature that casts mirages to fool seafarers toward their demise. Shen, a happy little sea-monster, relishes being the source of so many tall tales and tragic ends. Through illusory magic, this trickster embodies a combination of harmless mischief, spontaneous charity, and destructive malice. Her whims are every bit as tumultuous as the sea itself.

Shen has led a secluded life, surfacing only to cure her boredom through playing tricks. At a young age she learned a heartbreaking lesson about keeping her distance from those who would only seek to harm her. As a wyrmling, she lost her family in an attack by surface-dwelling raiders and believes she is the last of a once-burgeoning species of aquatic dragons. All she has left of her family are the *pearls of wisdom** her mother left her with when she hid Shen in the sand. Many decades later, she came of age and has recently laid pearlescent eggs. Now, her maternal instincts have transformed her whimsical tendencies into fierce protectiveness.

A Legend Untold. Krakens, hydras, and other large sea monsters typically hold the limelight in coastal folklore. Shen observes their brute-force antics from below the surface of the water and finds them trite. Dwelling in her underwater castle built from clams, Shen passes the time by playing elaborate and sometimes deadly pranks on surface-dwellers and those who venture too close to her lair. One of her fondest memories was when a ship passed over her lair and she created the illusion of a murmuration of swallows. It was an entrancing enough sight on its own, but she sent the birds diving into the water where they promptly transformed into clams. The sailors aboard were too distracted by what they had just seen that they failed to steer clear of a shoal that tore through the ship's hull, sinking the vessel and drowning the crew.

Secrets Abound. To the reckless treasure-seeker or adventurer who dares approach Shen, she initially appears as nothing more than a monstrously large clam. Because she lairs in a secluded, difficult-to-find place, she has little-known information about her surroundings and uses it to play tricks on her opponents. To Shen, the value of a secret is immeasurable and is often the source of woe to those who keep it hidden and weal to those who unearth it.

Fish and shellfish gather news on her behalf in exchange for safety from various predators within her realm. In this way, she stays well-apprised of the comings and goings of interlopers who would attempt to wrest away her own precious secret: within her clam castle, nested among thousands of smaller pearls, are three giant pearls. These monstrously large gems are, in actuality, aquatic dragon eggs.

Triple Threat. Her capricious nature aside, Shen is a creature not to be trifled with. When defeated in her initial form of **Shen the clam-monster**, she immediately takes on the form of a **Shen the monstrous carp**. And when her attackers believe they have slain *that* creature, she shows her true form—**Shen the aquatic dragon**.

Roleplaying Shen

Although fiercely protective of her lair and eggs, Shen is playful by nature. She wholly believes that rules don't apply to her and is therefore quite fond of breaking them. As a result, her conjured mirages and illusory effects often defy the principles of logic and understanding. They are equal parts whimsy and bewilderment.

Due to her isolation from the surface world, Shen relies heavily on information gathered from her whisper network of underwater creatures, filtering her news through a certain lens. Whether wittingly or not, she often defies conventional behavior. If nothing else, her erratic personality serves to keep her opponents on their toes.

Shen's Tactics

Shen prefers to rest during the day, which accounts for her ire if woken during these hours by fishing trawlers or treasure seekers. While in any of her three forms (clam-monster, monstrous carp, young aquatic dragon), Shen has access to lair actions and regional effects. When she reaches 0 hit points, she instantly transforms into her next form until she is defeated in her final form.

As a clam-monster, Shen burrows just below the surface of sand or other materials that serve to obfuscate her location and waits for prey to pass overhead before ambushing them. In this form, she focuses her attacks on a single melee opponent. If more than one melee attacker engages with the clam-monster, she uses her Scintillating Shell ability in an attempt to stun her opponents. When moderately injured, Shen retreats into her shell and burrows.

In her monstrous carp form, Shen resorts to brute force in order to oust trespassers from her territory, lashing out with her tail and vicious bite. Her swift swimming speed allows Shen to easily outmaneuver her opponents in this form. Additionally, her ability to deflect spells gives spellcasters pause and evens the odds. Shen will only back down in this form when severely injured, retreating to her lair.

As an aquatic dragon, Shen keeps her distance, using her breath weapon and trying to reposition herself to hit as many attackers as possible in the flurry of clams. In this form, Shen only makes melee attacks when she can easily get away after doing so. Shen is no fool, and when very injured she will switch tactics, attempting to parley in order to negotiate a peaceful resolution and save her eggs.

Shen's Traits

Ideal. "I never play the same prank twice."

Bond. "My eggs and future wyrmlings are the most important thing in my life, and I will do anything to protect them."

Flaw. "I'm convinced that no one could ever trick me the way I trick others."

Adventure Hooks

Consider the following plot hooks if you wish to incorporate Shen into your campaign:

Roaring Trade. A harbormaster hires the adventuring party to investigate a new trade route after several vessels have gone missing. For the past few weeks, she suspected pirates were to blame, but survivors of the latest wreckage tell tales of a bizarre sea creature that struck in the night.

The Lost Civilization. A wealthy noble with a penchant for archaeology believes they have discovered a map to a long-lost civilization thought to have sunk somewhere in the middle of the ocean. They wish to uncover its secrets, particularly any artifacts or lost knowledge. The noble is most obsessed with claims of large pearls rumored to litter the sunken city, which they intend to use to fund the rest of their collection.

Monster Alley. Sightings of krakens, devil whales, sirens, and more abound along a corridor in the middle of the ocean known as Monster Alley. The owner of a curiosity shop that specializes in cryptids wants to open a monster conservation aquarium and will pay fairly for each creature captured. These creatures are actually defensive mirages created by Shen to protect her eggs.

Castle In The Sea

Shen dwells in an underwater clamshell castle in the middle of an unclaimed archipelago. The lair and its surroundings change daily according to Shen's whims. Large predators and other sea monsters steer clear of the aquatic dragon's lair. As such, seafarers are more likely to have random encounters with these creatures before they reach the clam castle. For each day of a voyage, roll 1d20. On a 19 or 20, the ship has a random encounter.

3d4	Encounter
3	2d6 **giant sharks**
4	One **water elemental**
5–6	A whirlpool that is 20d10 feet in diameter and has a velocity of 25 feet forms in the sea. When a creature moves into the whirlpool or starts its turn there, it must make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. On a success, the creature can move normally. On a failure, the creature is immediately moved toward the vortex's center at the whirlpool's velocity, and the creature is restrained by the whirlpool until the start of its next turn. If the creature reaches the whirlpool's center, the creature is pulled 25 feet under the surface.
7–8	One **hydra**
9	While traveling at sea, the adventuring party catches a glimpse of a wondrous mirage: a pearlescent castle on a small island with a beach that shimmers like crushed gemstones. The group has to pass a collective DC 10 Investigation check or sail off course for 1 day. The illusion vanishes when they get within 100 feet of it.
10	3d6 **merrow**
11	3d8 **harpies**
12	A coven of three **sea hags**

Lair Actions

Shen is at the height of her power within her lair, where she delights in disorienting and playing illusory tricks on uninvited guests. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Shen takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects. Shen can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- Emanating a kaleidoscopic rainbow, Shen creates a dazzling display of lights reflecting across the pearlescent walls of her lair as though she had cast *color spray* (spell save DC 15) at 5th level. The blindness lasts until initiative count 20 on the next round.
- Summoning her whispering seafloor allies, a bed of snapping clams (use statistics for a swarm of quippers with a speed of 0) fills a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on a point Shen chooses within 120 feet of her. The clams spread around corners and remain until she dismisses them as an action, uses this lair action again, or dies. The space occupied by the clams is lightly obscured. Any creature in the bed of clams when it appears must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A creature that ends its turn in the bed of clams takes 10 (3d6) piercing damage.
- Radiating with a phosphorescent glow, Shen creates a ghostly mirage of her choosing that floats inside a 30-foot cube within 120 feet of her for a moment and then vanishes. Each creature in the area who sees the image must make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature becomes charmed until the end of its next turn. While charmed by this spell, the creature is incapacitated and has a speed of 0. The effect ends for an affected creature if it takes any damage or if someone else uses an action to shake the creature out of its stupor.

Regional Effects

The region around Shen's lair is warped by her magic.

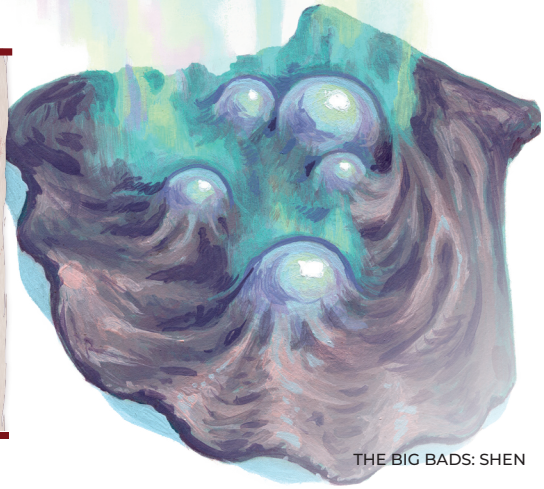
- Once per day, Shen can create an illusion that alters the appearance of the area around her lair. She doesn't need to be outdoors to do so, and the effects spread in a 6-mile radius from the lair; otherwise, the effect is identical to the *hallucinatory terrain* spell (spell save DC 15).
- Within 1 mile of its lair, Shen leaves no physical evidence of her passage unless she wishes to. Tracking her there is impossible except by magical means.
- Within her lair, Shen can set illusory sounds, such as soft music or strange echoes, that can be heard throughout the lair.
- Shen's lair is hidden by an illusion that alters the appearance of the area around the lair in a 6-mile radius. Apart from the enhanced range, this effect behaves exactly like a permanent *hallucinatory terrain* spell (spell save DC 15.) Shen can choose to dispel or reactivate this effect at any time.

If Shen dies, these effects end immediately.

Pearls of Wisdom

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

There are 1d4 + 2 magical pearls inlaid into this clam shell, and the shell has the same number of charges. The pearls cannot be removed from the shell. As a bonus action, you can expend one charge and activate one of the pearls to cast *enthrall* (spell save DC 15). The shell regains all expended charges each day at dawn.



Shen the Clam-Monster

Large monstrosity, chaotic neutral

Armor Class	16 (natural armor)
Hit Points	52 (5d10 + 25)
Speed	5 ft., burrow 10 ft., swim 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	5 (−3)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	5 (−3)

Damage Immunities acid

Senses blindsight 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Draconic, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Magic-Repellent Shell. Shen has advantage on saving throws against spells, and any creature making a spell attack against her has disadvantage on the attack roll.

Regenerative Shell. Shen regains 10 hit points at the start of her turn. Shen dies only if she starts her turn with 0 hit points.

Water Breathing. Shen can only breathe underwater.

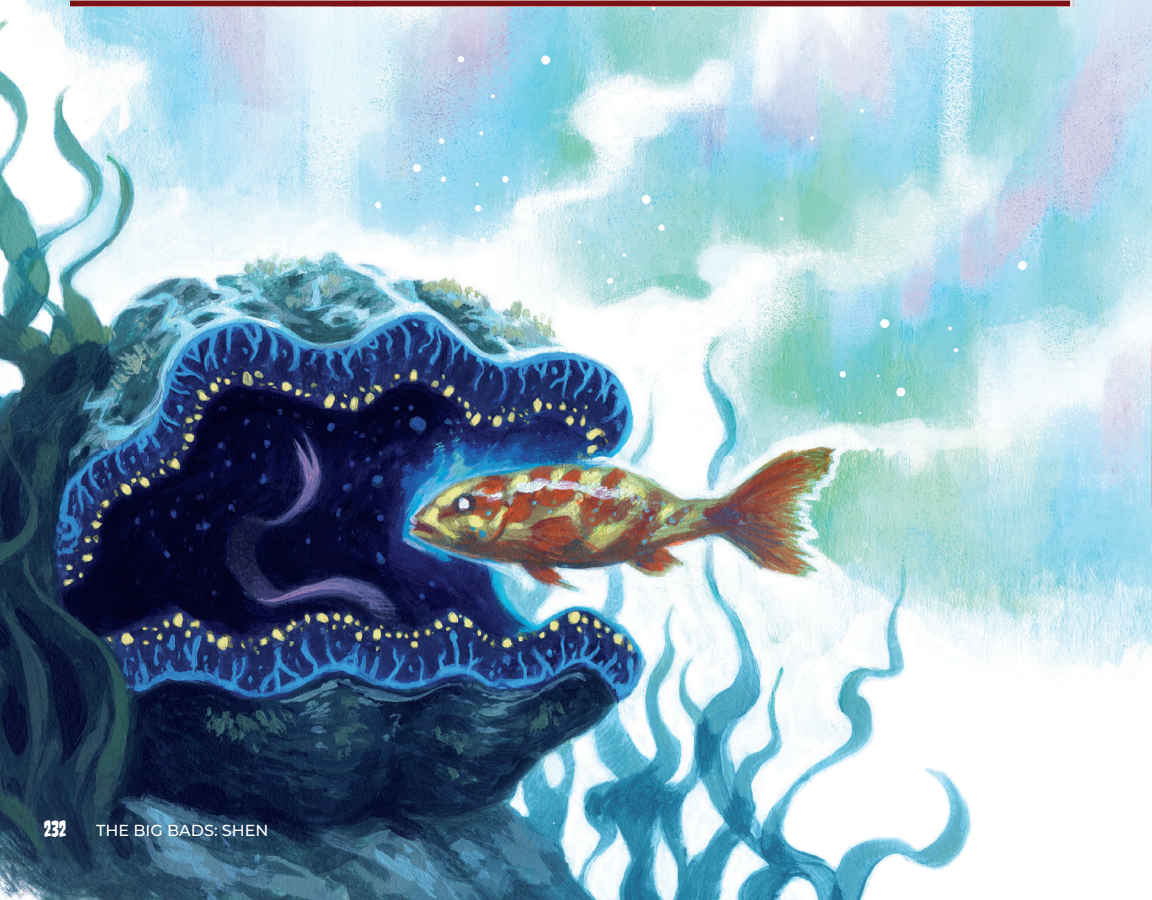
Actions

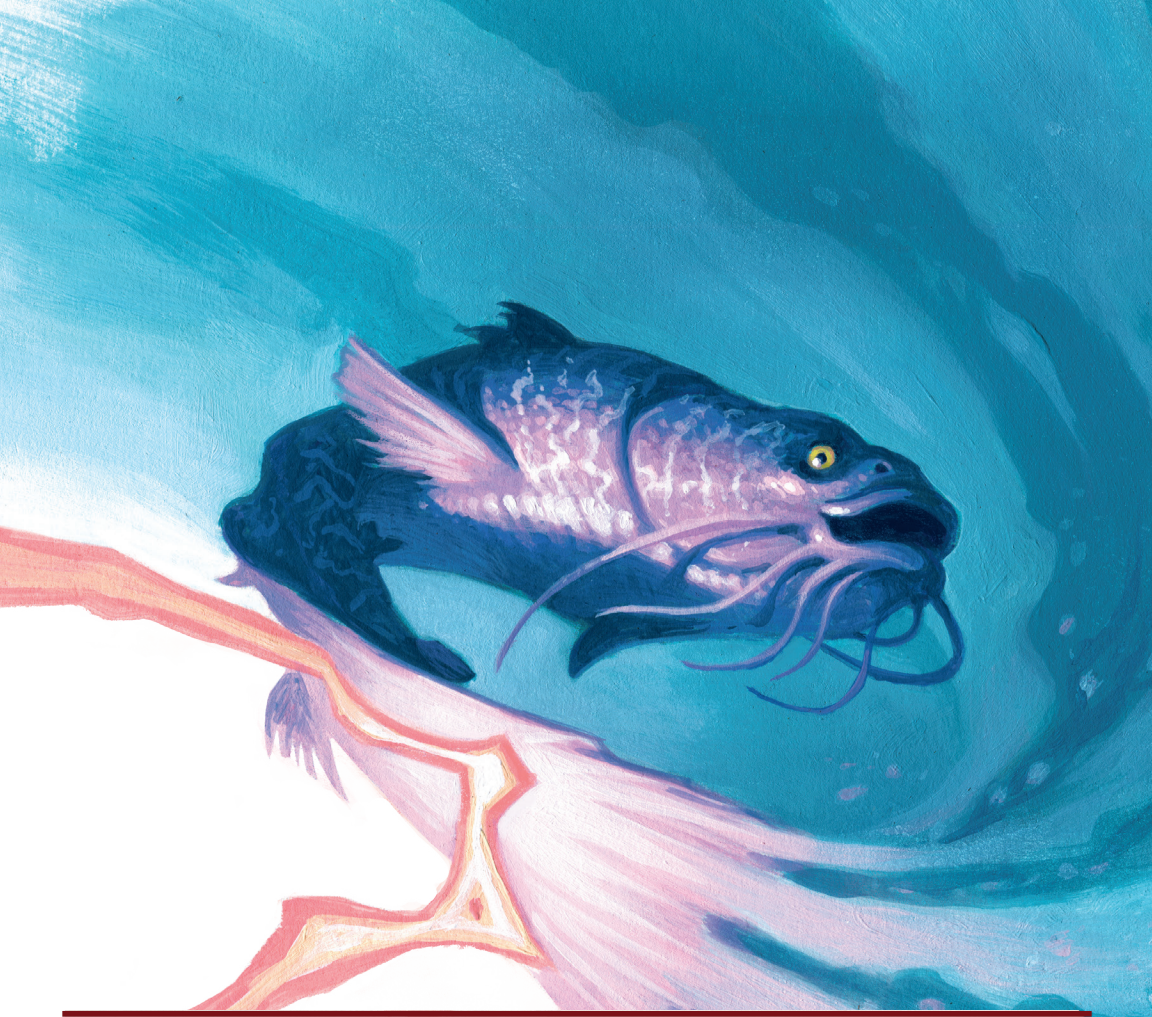
Multiattack. Shen makes three bite attacks, all against the same target.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, plus 3 (1d6) acid damage.

Scintillating Shell (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). Shen's shell emits a shifting pattern of dazzling hues until the end of her next turn. During this time, her shell sheds bright light in a 30-foot radius and dim light for an additional 30 feet, and creatures that can see Shen have disadvantage on attack rolls against her. In addition, any creature within the bright light that is able to see Shen when this power is activated must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be stunned until the light ends.

Shell Defense. Shen withdraws into her shell, gaining a +4 bonus to AC until she emerges. She can emerge from her shell as a bonus action on her turn.





Shen the Monstrous Carp

Large monstrosity, chaotic neutral

Armor Class	14
Hit Points	114 (12d10 + 48)
Speed	0 ft., swim 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (−1)

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Draconic, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Water Breathing. Shen can only breathe underwater.

Actions

Multiattack. Shen makes one attack with her bite and one attack with her tail smash.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage.

Tail Smash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Reactions

Spell Reflection. If Shen makes a successful saving throw against a spell, or a spell attack misses her, she can choose another creature (including the spellcaster) she can see within 120 feet of her. The spell targets the chosen creature instead of Shen. If the spell forces a saving throw, the chosen creature makes its own save. If the spell is an attack, the attack roll is rerolled against the chosen creature.

SHEN THE AQUATIC DRAGON

DEVIOUS DEEP DWELLER

Large dragon, chaotic neutral

Armor Class	18 natural armor
Hit Points	114 (12d10 +48)
Speed	40 ft., fly 80 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	10 (+0)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +3, Con +7, Wis +4, Cha +6

Skills Deception +6, Perception +7, Stealth +3

Damage Immunities cold

Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Common, Draconic, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Amphibious. Shen can breathe air and water.

Legendary Resistance (2/Day). If Shen fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multiattack. Shen makes three attacks: one with her bite and two with her claw.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Clam-nado Breath (Recharge 5–6). Shen exhales a tornado of clams in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 55 (10d10) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

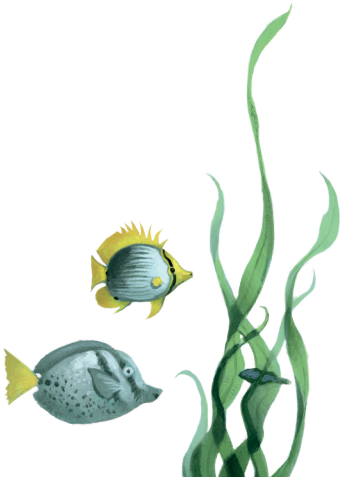
Legendary Actions

Shen can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Shen regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Claw. Shen makes a claw attack.

Detect. Shen makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Whirlwind Dive (Costs 2 Actions). Shen moves up to her swim or fly speed without provoking opportunity attacks.



SPECKLEBACK

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 008	ALIAS: The Last Frog
SIZE: Huge	TYPE: Monstrosity
DANGER LEVEL: 9	DEMEANOR: Monstrously Hungry

WARNING:

DON'T GET TONGUE TIED

NOTES:

Agents, stop bringing back lucky frog eggs every time you visit Speckleback unless you are willing and able to take care of them yourself. I know they're cute, but we're swimming in lucky frogs down here!

-Agent Golda Hibbert, Department of Amphibian Atrocities

Concept: Charlotte Ashley
Writing & Game Design: Charlotte Ashley
Original Cover: Mariah Tekulve
Illustrations: Rajaa Al-Subairi

HUNGRY, NOT PICKY

Speckleback, the last frog

There was a time when Clearecho Swamp was a thriving wetland teeming with freshwater fish, sharp-nosed turtles, long-legged birds, and thousands of peeping, gulping, splish-splashing frogs. That time has passed. **Speckleback** has eaten them all.

Half-buried in the silty shallows of an isolated hammock, ringed by a grove of drooping sallow trees heavy with moss and kudzu, the huge frog known as Grandmother Miss Tawny Speckleback eats, waits, eats, waits, and eats. She eats any living thing within her reach, which was greater back when she was younger and smaller. Now, grown as big as a haystack and unable to move without great difficulty, she lives almost entirely on her own magically fertilized eggs.

The Swamp. Nobody remembers what happened in the hills surrounding Clearecho Swamp. Some say a wizard made his tower there; others swear it was the site of a divine battle. Little remains of the historical cataclysm, except for long-crumbled ruins and the low-level magical residue in the land itself. Every spring, these traces of magic flow with the meltwater into Clearecho Swamp, are taken up by the thirsty roots of the trees, and are expelled with the pollen. The enchanted miasma blankets the entire swamp, just enough magic to make a nonmagical person uncomfortably allergic, but not enough to be harnessed for any magical effect.

However, year after year, trace magic has seeped into Miss Speckleback's eggs, and year after year, the great frog has eaten these eggs. Each year as Tawny Speckleback grew larger, laid more, and ate more, the old magic coming down off the hills accumulated in her massive body. Now, the potent eggs she lays are anything but ordinary.

A Seasonal Ecosystem. As soon as the mud thaws each spring, Miss Speckleback wriggles out of hibernation. She lays her delicious clutch of eggs not much later: hundreds of skull-sized globs of translucent jelly, each containing a little black spot.

Miss Speckleback is delighted by the arrival of her precious brood. As the season progresses the tiny spots fatten, growing into plump tadpoles with curlicue tails and big dark eyes that shine with freshness. Some gleam with fruity colours, others crunch with sharp horns, and still more ooze with rich energies—every one, their own personality, every one, their own flavor.

The massive frog begins devouring her eggs almost immediately after laying them, hungry from her long hibernation, then with more leisurely care as the sun warms and their bodies ripen. By early summer, she only plucks a few per day, savouring the explosion of juice and power on her tongue. Their eyes follow her now, bright and trusting, big enough to fill the whole egg to bursting. They squirm in happy circles, blissfully unaware their siblings are being devoured, vanishing steadily into their great mother. The tadpoles have waited their whole lives for this.

By midsummer's eve, only a few eggs remain. Occasionally, one pops free of its membrane and plops into the swamp, bathed in mud and moss for the first time. Miss Speckleback watches it with patience as it floats and blinks, awakening to a life outside the clutch. Then, gently, she ladles it out of the water with her great tongue and rolls it back into her mouth, crushing it against her palate with satisfaction.

By solstice, all her offspring are gone.

An Unpredictable Diet. Grandmother Miss Tawny Speckleback was once an ordinary, if cannibalistic, frog, and she remains a mundane, if monstrous, frog. She is not inherently magical in any way herself, but her frogspawn are so potent that she is almost always under the influence of a meal's worth of random magical effects. Miss Speckleback is unintelligent and has no sense of what her diet does to her, nor has she any particular preference in magical egg flavour. Her long, searching tongue reaches out, almost of its own accord, and brings back whatever luck has for her. She is just as likely to be suffering from the ill effects of a *potion of poison* as the benefits of a *potion of speed*. The only lesson she has learned is that which does not kill her makes her stronger. To date, nothing has killed her, and she is very strong indeed.

An Unlucky Egg

Roleplaying Speckleback

Grandmother Miss Tawny Speckleback is unintelligent, but that does not mean that she is without personality. She has been around longer than anyone can remember, and that isn't just because she was lucky enough to make her home in a magic swamp. She is tough, belligerent, and bloody-minded, and she has an aggressive streak that looks a lot like spite.

Miss Speckleback understands perfectly well that any living thing within twenty feet of her is either food or is looking to take her food. The solution to both problems is to eat the offending creature. If this is not as simple as wrapping her tongue around the intruder and swallowing it whole, Miss Speckleback appears to grow offended. She relentlessly lashes out with her tongue (or front legs, should the creature come close enough) with the goal of not just subduing her target, but humiliating it as well. She shows a particular liking for pushing people into the mud, holding them down, letting them up just so she can knock them down again, and smacking them in their vulnerable places. If something makes her prey squeal or complain, she is likely to do it more. Then, once they have grown limp enough, she eats them with particular satisfaction.

Speckleback's Tactics

Whether she is completely submerged in the mud or above ground, Miss Speckleback always remains perfectly still. However, she has excellent eyesight and is likely to spot anything moving within half a mile of her. She fixates on that movement with a centenarian's patience. Anything she spots she tracks, unblinkingly, without becoming distracted.

Miss Speckleback's eggs, when she has them, are clustered close around her hind quarters, filling a deep rut in the mud. She does not turn or move, aside from flicking her tongue and lifting her legs to swat intruders, but she is vigilantly protective of her clutch. Her long tongue is usually more than adequate to snatch any would-be thieves from a distance. If Miss Speckleback notices anyone trying

to so much as *touch* her eggs, she focuses her attacks on them. If swallowing the offender is taking too long or proving ineffective, she turns to her burrowing abilities to trap and hopefully drown the trespasser.

Miss Speckleback continues to harass the intruders with her tongue and legs, slapping, pinning, and dominating them until she feels she can make a successful grapple. If she is facing multiple targets, she attempts to pin some under her feet while grappling one at a time with her tongue.

If, however, she feels she is in danger of becoming seriously wounded by particularly damaging attacks or ranged attacks from a target she cannot reach, Miss Speckleback takes her eggs and escapes by turning her entire lair into a sinkhole and burrowing to safety beneath the mud.

Speckleback's Traits

Ideal: "There is nothing in the whole of the world that cannot be eaten. Eat everything!"
Bond: "There is only I, and the food. I am the only, and I gets all the food!"
Flaw: "Some food prickles and other tickles, and some makes rumbles and others nibble. Food can lay me low, but always, *always* I live to eat another day."

Adventure Hooks

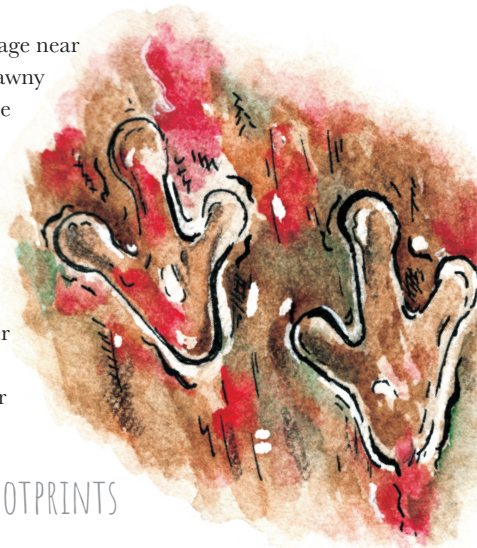
Consider the following scenarios if you wish to include Grandmother Miss Tawny Speckleback in your campaign:

The Lucky Frog. A leatherworker in a small hamlet has a peculiar companion: a dog-sized frog with a magical aura. The frog is known to bring luck and wealth to the village, and, indeed, the residents appear to be blessed with extraordinary fortune in everything from bountiful harvests to spectacular hunts to chancing across unearthed relics. The proud residents boast that their lucky frog is the only surviving offspring of its monstrous mother.

The village's magistrate plans to start a lucrative business selling lucky frogs and employs a party of adventurers to ransack Miss Speckleback's swamp. Many of the residents, however, don't want to risk incurring the ancient frog's wrath, and they beseech the very same party to thwart the magistrate's plans and help keep Miss Speckleback's location a secret.

A Magical Haze. Wizards from the local branch of an arcane guild are researching the phenomenon of an enchanted pollen storm that occurs every spring in the nearby Clearecho Swamp. They have sent in two research expeditions, but these have not returned. Now they feel it would be prudent to hire a better-trained team to accompany one of their wizards into the area. They only want a few samples! A healthy jar of pollen, perhaps some of the buds? And any other evidence of unique magical phenomena, of course.

Dazed and Confused. The residents of a marsh-side village near Clearecho Swamp have a soft spot for Grandmother Miss Tawny Speckleback. She has kept the region almost entirely pest-free for generations, their own curmudgeonly old guardian and local celebrity. But it was a snowy winter, spring came early, and Miss Speckleback must have awoken prematurely with a terrible hunger, because she is not her usual self. Their sedentary great Grandmother has been moving. She has been spotted passing—flying—by the inner cottages in a decidedly un-frog-like state. It would seem that Grandmother Miss Tawny Speckleback has partaken of a few dozen too many of her magical eggs and needs to be settled back in her lair before some harm comes to her. Or everyone else.



Froggy Footprints

Clearecho Swamp

Grandmother Miss Tawny Speckleback is a product of her environment. Not only did Clearecho Swamp make her what she is, but her den is her entire world. She never leaves. Her needs come to her. Though she has no magic powers herself, her connection to the swamp is strong and gives her access to lair actions.

Lair Actions

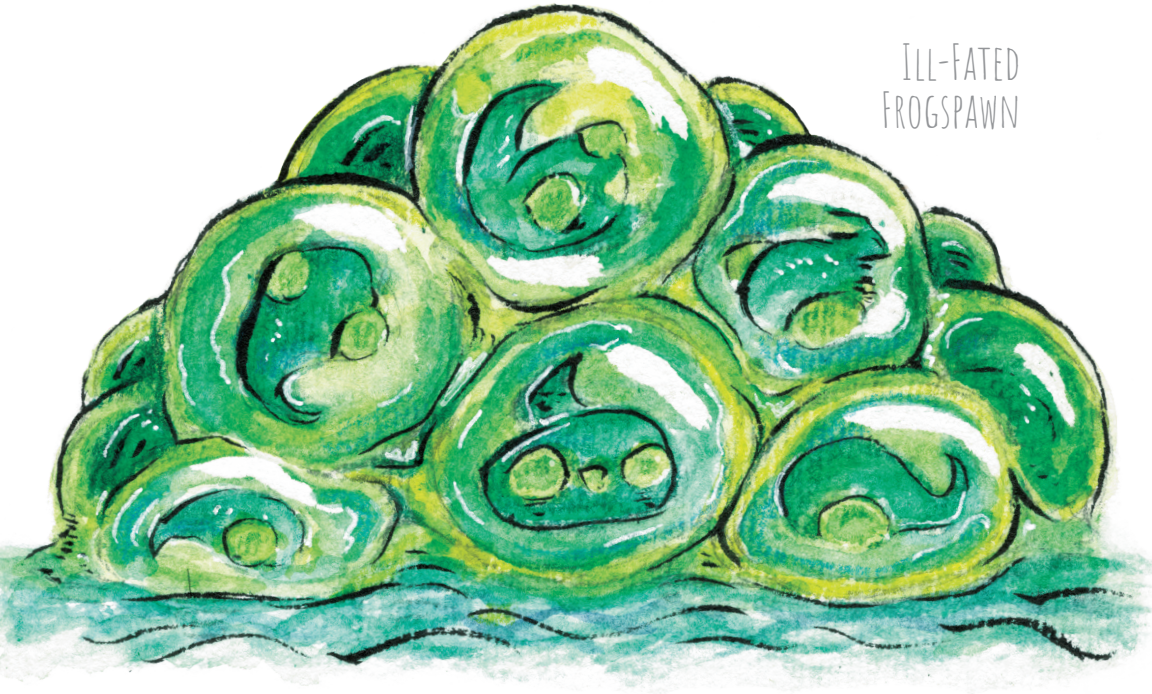
On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Grandmother Miss Tawny Speckleback can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects. She can't use the same lair action two rounds in a row:

- Speckleback eats one of her eggs. She cannot take this action if she is currently grappling anyone with her tongue. Roll on the **Frogspawn chart** for the egg's effect. The effect takes hold immediately.
- Speckleback churns up the loose mud around her with a rumble deep in her belly. Any creature in the mud within 10 feet of her must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or be sucked into a sinkhole. The creature sinks half its height into the thick mud and must be helped out by someone on solid ground (helping someone out of a sinkhole costs an action). Struggling and attempting to climb out of the mud unassisted causes the trapped creature to sink farther into the mud. If it continues to struggle for three turns, it becomes completely submerged and risks suffocating.

Regional Effects

In the spring and summertime, Miss Speckleback's swamp is thick with enchanted pollen. It has no magical effect on anyone, but it causes most creatures to become allergic. Creatures who do not need to breathe do not become allergic.

- Allergic creatures travelling through the swamp in the spring or summertime have disadvanatge on Constitution saving throws.
- Allergic creatures suffer miserably with sneezing, sniffling, and itchy eyes. Rolling a natural 1 on any Stealth check causes the creature to sneeze loudly and immediately attract the attention of any creatures in the area.



Frogspawn Chart

All Miss Speckleback's eggs have the effect of the oils or potions listed below. All Frogspawn effects last 1 hour. Feel free to swap in potions and effects specific to your campaign setting.

d20	Effect
1-2	*Oil of slipperiness*
3-4	*Potion of animal friendship*
5-6	*Potion of growth*
7-8	*Potion of poison*
9-10	*Potion of resistance*
11	*Oil of etherealness*
12	*Potion of diminution*
13	*Potion of gaseous form*
14	*Potion of healing, superior*
15	*Potion of heroism*
16	*Potion of flying*
17	*Potion of cloud giant strength*
18	*Potion of invisibility*
19	*Potion of speed*
20	Roll twice and apply both effects.

The Lucky Few

If any of Miss Speckleback's eggs are successfully removed from her lair and are properly cared for, one of them eventually hatches into a **lucky frog**. If only one egg is removed, it is the lucky frog. If many eggs are removed, only one is a lucky frog. If many are removed and all are destroyed but one, the remaining one is the lucky frog. (It is, after all, lucky).

Lucky frogs are joyous, cheerful, dog-sized frogs that come in every possible pattern and color. They are irresistibly adorable from the time they are tadpoles in the egg all the way through grown froghood.

LUCKY FROG

Small monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class	11
Hit Points	5 (1d6 + 2)
Speed	20 ft., burrow 20 ft., swim 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (−4)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	4 (−3)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, force, lightning, necrotic, poison, psychic, radiant, thunder

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 0 (0 XP)

Amphibious. The lucky frog can breathe air and water.

Good for All. All creatures within 60 feet of the lucky frog gain a +5 bonus to all skill checks.

Lucky. The lucky frog makes all rolls with advantage. Additionally, if the lucky frog has bonded with another creature, becoming a beast companion or a pet, that creature can use the following ability up to three times per day: Whenever a creature makes an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, it may choose to roll an additional d20. It must choose to use this ability before making the roll. It may then choose which of the two results to use.

Standing Leap. The lucky frog's long jump is up to 20 feet and her high jump is up to 10 feet, with or without a running start.

SPECKLEBACK

THE LAST FROG

Huge monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class	10 (natural armor)
Hit Points	229 (17d12 + 119)
Speed	5 ft., burrow 20 ft., swim 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	5 (−3)	24 (+7)	4 (−3)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +10, Con +11

Skills Perception +6, Athletics +10

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages —

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Amphibious. Speckleback can breathe air and water.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Speckleback fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead. This trait does not apply to the effects of ingesting her eggs.

Magic Resistance. Speckleback has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Standing Leap. Speckleback's long jump is up to 20 feet and her high jump is up to 10 feet, with or without a running start.

Under the Influence. If Speckleback is engaged in the spring or summertime, she will be under the influence of at least two of her magic eggs at the time the encounter begins. Roll twice on the Frogspawn chart and modify her stats accordingly.

Actions

Multiattack. Speckleback makes two attacks: one with a front leg and one with her tongue.

Leap (Recharges on a Short or Long Rest). Speckleback jumps up to 60 feet.

Leg. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 33 (5d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Tongue. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 33 (5d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage. If the target is Medium or smaller, it is grappled. Speckleback can only have one creature grappled in this way at a time.

Swallow. One creature grappled by Speckleback must make a DC 16 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the grappled creature is swallowed, and the grapple ends. While swallowed, the target is blinded and restrained, has total cover against attacks and other effects outside Speckleback, and takes 21 (6d6) acid damage at the start of each of Speckleback's turns.

If Speckleback takes 30 or more damage in a single turn from the swallowed creature, she must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate the creature, which falls prone in a space within 10 feet of Speckleback. If Speckleback dies, the swallowed creature is no longer restrained and can escape by using 15 feet of movement.

Burrow. If Speckleback is reduced below 50 hit points, takes more than 60 damage from a single source, or takes only ranged attack damage for more than one consecutive round, she can attempt to escape by churning up the loose mud around her in a 30-foot-by-30-foot square centered on herself. She descends downward into the mud at a speed of 20 feet, and the swampy mud fills up the tunnel behind her.

Anything caught in this churn must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or be sucked into a sinkhole. The creature sinks half its height into the thick mud and must be helped out by a creature on solid ground using its action. Struggling and attempting to climb out of the mud unassisted causes the trapped creature to sink farther into the mud. If it continues to struggle for three turns, the creature becomes completely submerged and begins to suffocate.

Speckleback's eggs all become submerged immediately when she uses her Burrow action. She only submerges for 1 round (20 feet) unless pursued. If pursued, she continues to burrow until she senses that pursuit has stopped.

Legendary Actions

Speckleback can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Speckleback regains all spent legendary actions at the start of her turn

Lick. Speckleback slobbers on a creature within 10 feet of her. The creature must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or drop one item it is holding on the ground (Speckleback's choice).

Pin. Speckleback steps on a creature that is prone and holds it down. It becomes restrained (escape DC 17).

Slap. Speckleback makes a tongue attack. If the attack hits, the target is thrown 10 feet away.

Trip. Speckleback swipes at a creature within 10 feet of her. The target must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.

TENDON & BONE

BIG BAD BUREAU CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 012	ALIAS: Crystal Cursed Pair
SIZE: Medium & Large	TYPE: Humanoid & Monstrosity
DANGER LEVEL: 3 & 4	DEMEANOR: Dangerously Devoted Duo

WARNING:

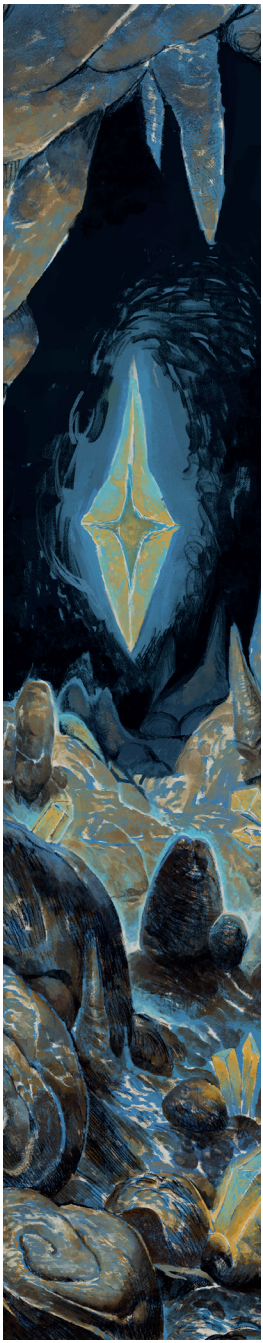
IF YOU SEE THEM IT'S TOO LATE

NOTES:

Agents, you could learn a thing or two about teamwork from Tendon and Bone. This pair really knows how to work together. I'd ask them to run a training course if it weren't for the whole eating people thing.

-Scorpio Sala, Head of Humanoid Resources

Concept: Jay Jackson
Writing & Game Design: Jay Jackson
Original Cover: Brittany Pezzillo
Illustrations: Henrik Rosenborg



THE DARK HUNGERS

Tendon & Bone, Crystal Cursed Pair

Deep in the crystal mines of Bog'rah Dihn, past grand chambers slashed through with prismatic gems that will shoot out a thousand, flitting glints if you light even a candle stub, there are narrow, claustrophobic passages where darkness lurks. Don't be fooled by the sparkling beauty. Don't wander farther down, for others lurk here as well, creeping along the ceiling, growing shards of nasty things, and playing tricks within the gloom.

Cursed Heritage. In the eternal darkness beneath the earth the spider goddess, who rules all blackness, summoned a drow female to be tried. Found lacking, the spider goddess transformed the drow into a drider—a horrific hybrid of elf and spider. Despite being with child, the other drow drove the drider out to wander the darkness alone. Under the dripping stalactites, the drider gave birth and discovered that her child too had been touched by the spider goddess's curse. The newborn had long claws and too many eyes. In despair, the drider threw herself and her spawn down a cavernous drop, landing on a sharp crystal which pierced both their hearts. The mother perished there in the darkness, but the cursed crystals of Bog'rah Dihn had different plans for the child. Kept alive by some unknown power, she broke free, leaving the tip of the crystal still embedded in her small, twisted heart. The infant did not cry for her mother. She stretched her limbs, tasted the air, and skittered off to find food.

Perfect for the Dark. The abomination calls herself **Tendon**. No one knows why. Perhaps it is because of all the fleshy parts on her body. Or perhaps it's because tendons take the longest to chew, a fact that has become her only entertainment in the nearly eternal hours of the obsidian darkness. Despite, or maybe because of, the spider goddess's curse, Tendon is perfectly crafted for life in the dark. The spider eyes speckled across her face provide her with a superb darkvision range. The sparse hairs that cover her skin allow her to feel the slightest of breezes, so she is difficult to surprise. Even in complete darkness, she can find prey with her long fingers. The only clue that she's there is the gentle ticking noise of her claws against the rock. A wide grin, a savage bite, and paralyzing poison follow in dizzying succession. Tendon is masterful in the darkness.

A Gift of the Caves. Unbeknown to Tendon, another force kept her safe in her dangerous home. Tendon's heart-bound crystal guided her through the cursed tunnels of Bog'rah Dihn, like a silent whisper in the back of her mind. As she grew older and began to explore farther and deeper into Bog'rah Dihn, the crystal tugged at Tendon's subconscious, steering her toward a strange sight in the depths: a cave hag locked in a hopeless fight with an enormous spider. Tendon could only snicker as the feeble hag made a futile attempt to harm the spider by throwing a handful of crystal shards at it, which barely pierced its hide. There was clearly no hope for the hag, when suddenly she lifted up a green prism necklace, made from the very cursed crystals

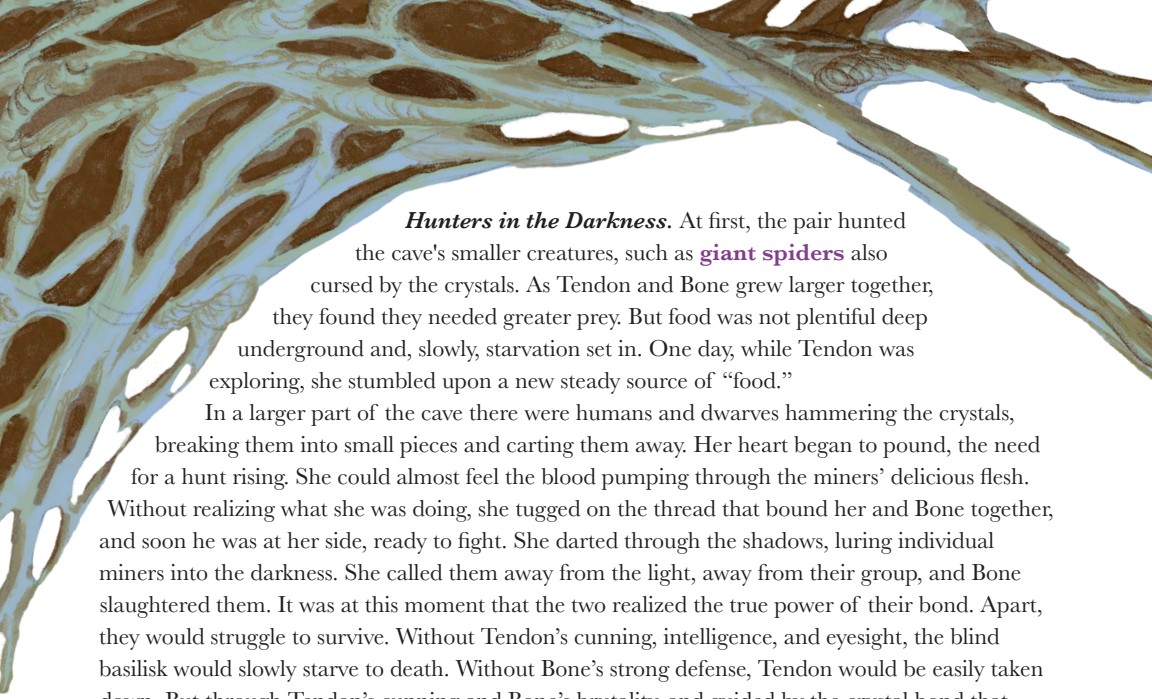
that covered the walls of Bog'rah Dihn, and began to hum. In that moment, Tendon's heart-crystal hummed too, and she was compelled to creep closer. The necklace and the shards both began to glow. Green wisps of energy flowed out of the spider and into the hag. In mere moments, the spider lay twitching on the ground, and the hag stood triumphant. Tendon's heart ached for the crystal necklace and, in a blink, she'd strangled the hag from behind with it and claimed the item as her own. Tendon had never seen anything more beautiful than the necklace and the crystals that it grew. A connection between her heart-crystal and this potent gift of the caves quickly began to form. She named this new treasure the *necklace of crystal resonance**.

Predatory Partnership. Tendon's newfound necklace amplified her heart-crystal's influence, guiding her down paths and parts of the cavern she'd never explored before. Her heart-crystal's greatest boon came when Tendon found herself cornered in a dead-end passageway by a filthy duergar. As the deep dwarf swung its war pick, Tendon braced herself for the end. However, instead of the pain she expected, the duergar's head splattered on the wall as a thick, bony tail embedded with crystalline spikes smashed through it. Tendon followed the tail back to a starving young basilisk. It had been blinded in both eyes, a dagger stuck in one eye, shards of crystal stuck deep in the other. Tendon felt intensely connected to this creature, like invisible green strings were pulling her, the basilisk, and the crystal necklace together in the blackness. She felt both of their hungers and their murderous desires. She felt the creature's pain. Nervously at first, she sliced out the choicest cuts of the duergar's flesh and fed them to the starving basilisk. After it ate its fill, she tended to its wounded eyes. It was then that she named it **Bone**, for that was how the blind creature's hard skin felt in the darkness.

THE CRYSTAL CURSE OF BOG'RAH DIHN

The duergar of Bog'rah Dihn have kept their mine hidden from prying eyes for hundreds of years, excavating the strange green crystals found there to their dark hearts' content. This hoard of riches does come with a downside: the crystal curse. Through mishap or mayhem, the duergar miners inevitably find themselves with slivers of the green crystal stuck in their flesh. Assuming the initial injury doesn't kill them, the embedded crystals begin to corrupt them, filling them with foul necrotic energies. In most cases the curse spreads straight to the heart, turning the sufferer to solid green crystal and killing them.

There are rare instances, however, where a creature is strong enough to resist the ill effects of the curse, and instead bonds with it. These survivors of the crystal curse find themselves more resilient, their attacks more potent and, most importantly, more in tune with the crystals that permeate the caves of Bog'rah Dihn. Not only can these crystal cursed creatures channel strange crystalline energies, but they are guided by them as well. Where these energies lead is anyone's guess, but survivors are often driven to delve deeper and deeper into the crystal caves, never to be seen again.



Hunters in the Darkness. At first, the pair hunted the cave's smaller creatures, such as **giant spiders** also cursed by the crystals. As Tendon and Bone grew larger together, they found they needed greater prey. But food was not plentiful deep underground and, slowly, starvation set in. One day, while Tendon was exploring, she stumbled upon a new steady source of "food."

In a larger part of the cave there were humans and dwarves hammering the crystals, breaking them into small pieces and carting them away. Her heart began to pound, the need for a hunt rising. She could almost feel the blood pumping through the miners' delicious flesh. Without realizing what she was doing, she tugged on the thread that bound her and Bone together, and soon he was at her side, ready to fight. She darted through the shadows, luring individual miners into the darkness. She called them away from the light, away from their group, and Bone slaughtered them. It was at this moment that the two realized the true power of their bond. Apart, they would struggle to survive. Without Tendon's cunning, intelligence, and eyesight, the blind basilisk would slowly starve to death. Without Bone's strong defense, Tendon would be easily taken down. But through Tendon's cunning and Bone's brutality, and guided by the crystal bond that connected them, they could take down almost any prey.

Roleplaying Tendon & Bone

Tendon and Bone's hunger is insatiable. In the cave their food supply is inconsistent, and they are constantly unsure about where their next meal will come from, so they take any opportunity to kill. They neither know nor care about the world outside and cannot be reasoned with. Everything is either danger or meat to them. They are loyal to one another because they could not survive without each other. Tendon is always aware and always watching, listening, and feeling. She depends upon the element of surprise to hunt, while Bone depends on brute strength. Despite everything, they are cautious. Unless they are in danger of starving, they do not show themselves until the odds are in their favor.

Tendon & Bone's Tactics

Tendon has a wide variety of tricks to lure in prey, but before she attacks she stalks her quarry, creeping along ceilings and walls, listening and gathering information. From long years skulking around in the gloom, as well as her spider heritage, her stealth is incredibly high. She mimics voices, distracts groups, and tries to separate parties before she attacks. She knows she only has one chance at surprise.

To catch her prey, Tendon often lures them into a carefully planned trap. She creates ambushes by blocking alternate passages, forcing her prey into long, narrow tunnels. Tendon observes the parties from the shadows, picking out whom she perceives as the weakest member, and tries to separate that target from the group. She slips through the darkness, whispering deceptively to her chosen targets, enticing them farther away from their fellows.

Bone does as much reckless damage as possible, distracting parties while Tendon silences and neutralizes the weakest members, either with paralyzing venom or by using her crystal necklace. Only the most perceptive notice in the heat of battle that a party member is missing.

Either way, Tendon and Bone hunt using deceit, distraction, and fear.

Tendon's Traits

Ideal. "Every living thing is danger. Every dead thing is food."
Bond. "Home is where Bone is."
Flaw. "I'm never satisfied."

Bone's Traits

Ideal. "Survival. Survival is all that matters."
Bond. "Tendon is my eyes, and I am her shield."
Flaw. "Once I begin my attack, I am reckless to a fault."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Tendon and Bone in your campaign.

Rescue Party. A villager has disappeared into the crystal mines of Bog'rah Dihn. The family begs for someone to traverse the dark and dangerous caverns and return the missing person alive. Barring that, they ask for the return of their loved one's remains.

Closed Mine. A local mine owner has found that it is impossible to assuage their superstitious workers' concerns and get them to return to the mine after several suspicious disappearances. The mine owner asks for help in proving to the workers that it is all in their imaginations, that the missing miners left of their own volition, and that there is nothing malevolent lurking in the shadows.

Spell Supplies. A wizard needs a crystal to complete a high-level spell. The only place it can be found is deep within the crystal mines, but the deep dwarves do not look kindly on intruders trying to steal the fruits of their mining efforts. The wizard asks for help sneaking in and retrieving the stone, in return for a healthy sum of gold, of course.

The Cursed Crystal Mines

Tendon and Bone have learned how to make use of every strange property possessed by the deep and dark caves of Bog'rah Dihn. Every strange shadow, every flicker of green light, can be used to give them an edge while hunting their quarry.

Lair Actions

Surrounded by the familiar crystals and caverns of Bog'rah Dihn, and while in possession of the *necklace of crystal resonance**, Tendon can turn the crystals on her enemies. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Tendon can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects. She can't use the same lair action two rounds in a row:

- Tendon chooses a creature she can see within 30 feet and begins to hum. Splintered shards of crystal shoot up through the ground and pierce the flesh of the creature, unless they succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. If the creature fails, it takes 5 (2d4) piercing damage and its movement is halved until the crystals are removed. The creature also takes 2 (1d4) piercing damage for each 5 feet of movement it takes while the crystal shards remain stuck. The shards remain embedded until the creature or an ally takes an action to make a DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check. On a success, the shards are removed from the creature with no further damage. In addition, the 5 feet where the crystals grew is considered difficult terrain.
- Nearby crystals resonate with a deep, sonorous rumble, and the ground begins to shake. Tendon chooses a point within 30 feet of her that she can see. All creatures within 30 feet of that point must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw to avoid impaling themselves on the crystals covering the walls and floor. If the creature fails, it falls onto the crystals, skewering itself and taking 7 (2d6) piercing damage. The creature is restrained and prone until it or an ally within 5 feet of it takes an action to remove it from the crystal by succeeding on a DC 16 Strength check.

Necklace of Crystal Resonance

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

While attuned to this necklace, you can channel the strange crystalline energies of the Bog'rah Dihn caves.

Three times per day, you can use a bonus action to teleport to an unoccupied, dark or dimly lit space up to 30 feet away from you.

As an action, you may choose a creature within 30 feet of you that has a shard of a Bog'rah Dihn crystal embedded somewhere in its flesh. The target creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. You regain hit points equal to the damage dealt by this effect.

When worn by a survivor of the crystal curse, the crystals in the necklace further amplify their powers, though little is known about the exact effects. Outside of the Bog'rah Dihn crystal caverns, the necklace has no powers, though the wearer may feel strongly compelled to return to the caves.

TENDON

CRYSTAL CURSED DROW ABOMINATION
Medium humanoid (drow), chaotic evil

Armor Class	13 (natural armor)
Hit Points	78 (12d8 + 24)
Speed	45 ft., climb 45 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12(+1)	15(+2)	14(+3)	12(+1)	18(+4)	8(−1)

Skills Deception +3, Stealth +7
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Elvish, Undercommon, Telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Special Equipment. Tendon is attuned to the *necklace of crystal resonance**.
Fey Ancestry. Tendon has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put her to sleep.

Spider Climb. Tendon can climb difficult surfaces, including on walls and upside down on ceilings, without needing to make ability checks.

Stealthy Prowl. Tendon can take the Disengage action as a bonus action and has advantage on all Stealth checks while in dim light or darkness.
Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, Tendon has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Telepathic Bond. Tendon and Bone share a telepathic link. If they are within 120 feet of each other, Tendon can relay knowledge or give orders that Bone attempts to follow on his next turn.

Actions

Multiattack. Tendon makes two attacks: one with her bite and one with her claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. The poisoned target is paralyzed and can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Draining Hum (3/Day). Tendon hums tunelessly while touching the necklace of crystal resonance to drain life out of her enemies. Each creature with crystal shards embedded in them due to Tendon's lair action takes 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. Tendon regains hit points equal to the damage taken.

BONE

CRYSTAL CURSED BASILISK
Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class	15 (natural armor)
Hit Points	105 (14d10 + 28)
Speed	25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18(+4)	8(−1)	15(+2)	5(−3)	8(−1)	7(−2)

Senses tremorsense 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius)
Languages —
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Blindness. Bone fails all perception checks that rely on sight unless Tendon is within 120 feet of him, in which case he has blindsight up to 60 feet.

Frenzy. If Tendon is ever reduced to 0 hit points, Bone becomes frenzied, throwing himself into the fight with no regard for himself. While frenzied, Bone has advantage on melee weapon attacks, but all attack rolls against him have advantage as well.

Telepathic Bond. Tendon and Bone share a telepathic link. If they are within 120 feet of each other, Tendon can relay knowledge or give orders that Bone attempts to follow on his next turn.

Actions

Multiattack. Bone can make two attacks: one with his bite and one with his crystal tail spikes.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage.

Crystal Tail Spikes. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) necrotic damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength or Dexterity saving throw (target's choice) or be knocked prone.

Roar. Bone's roar echoes through the cavern. Every creature within 30 feet of Bone must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or take 7 (2d6) thunder damage.

Legendary Team Actions

Tendon and Bone's crystal curse bond allows them to work together more efficiently. While within 60 feet of each other, and while Tendon possesses the *necklace of crystal resonance*, Tendon and Bone can collectively take 5 legendary actions between them, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Tendon and Bone regain all spent legendary actions on initiative count 20.

Bite. Bone uses his bite attack.

Claw. Tendon uses her claw attack.

Gruesome Impalement (Costs 2 Actions). Tendon moves up to 10 feet toward a creature standing within 5 feet of Bone. The creature must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or take 10 (4d4) piercing damage and be restrained as it is pierced on Bone's spikes. A creature remains restrained until it takes an action to free itself with a DC 13 Strength check. If Bone moves while a creature is restrained by this effect, the impaled creature moves with him. Only one creature can be restrained in this way at this time.

Crystalline Whispers (Costs 2 Actions). Tendon whispers terrifying words that echo through the crystals on the cavern walls and the crystals embedded in her and Bone. Every creature within 30 feet of either Tendon or Bone must succeed on a DC 14 Intelligence saving throw or take 14 (4d6) psychic damage. A creature that fails the save is also frightened of Tendon and Bone for 1 minute. The target may repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns to end the frightened condition. On a successful saving throw, the target is immune to Tendon's whispers for 24 hours.

Mounted Charge (Costs 3 Actions). Tendon moves up to her speed toward Bone and jumps on his back. Once mounted, Bone moves up to 25 feet in a straight line toward a creature and makes a bite attack targeting the creature. Neither Tendon or Bone can be targeted by opportunity attacks during this movement. On a hit, the target must also succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. While Bone is moving, any creatures he passes within 5 feet of him must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 3 (1d6) slashing damage as Tendon slashes at them with her claws.

THULYRIX

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 020	ALIAS: Ethereal Occultist Guardian
SIZE: Medium	TYPE: Aberration
DANGER LEVEL: 13	DEMEANOR: Eerily Parental

WARNING:

DON'T TOUCH THE EGG!

NOTES:

Thulyrix is one of our most mysterious cases. So far, we haven't been able to determine exactly what would emerge from that egg they carry. The eggheads down in Research have a betting pool set up. My money is on something squishy with far too many legs.

-Chief Runcible Scowler

Concept: Jason Levine
Writing & Game Design: Jason Levine
Original Cover: Riley Easter
Illustrations: Riley Easter

THE EGG MUST THRIVE!

Thulyrix the Liminal

The Ethereal Plane is both the swirling, churning mist of possibility from which countless worlds are born and what worlds become when they die. The strange beings that call this plane home are attuned to the beginning and ending of all things, and some can even get glimpses of things that have not yet come to pass. In these boundless clouds of mist is an alien egg of unknown purpose, an egg that cannot hatch unless brought into a world teeming with life on which it can feed. *The egg** needs a guardian to bear it to a world, protect it as it grows, and herald the arrival of the creature within. **Thulyrix** is that guardian. They are a hunter in the borders between worlds, a predator from a place without form, and a prophet of dire possibilities.

Thulyrix is a terrifying opponent, but they do not confront their targets directly. Protecting *the egg** is paramount; prey to feed the egg can be stalked over time and overtaken when they are most vulnerable. To this end, Thulyrix will even infiltrate and subvert the cities and governments of the natives of this world, mesmerizing their leaders and tasking them with collecting victims to nourish *the egg**. Thulyrix believes *the egg** to be of immense significance and wonder, but given their cruelty to the people who live on this world, heroes have reason to fear what it may hatch.

An Invader from the Mists. Thulyrix is not from this world, nor from any world. Thulyrix slipped from the mists of the Deep Ethereal bearing a swirling, mercurial egg the size of a human's head. Here on the Material Plane, they must build a nest for *the egg** and "feed" it by ritually sacrificing life from this world and bathing *the egg** in the sacrificial blood so that it may hatch. Does *the egg** bear Thulyrix's young, their species unknown to this world? Or does it contain something much more dangerous?

An Occult Agenda. *The egg** is all that matters to Thulyrix. And to hatch, *the egg** needs a proper nest. Hidden away from curious eyes (perhaps deep in a forest or in a desolate, unexplored cave), Thulyrix builds a twisted, towering nest of dry twigs, dead foliage, and countless polished bones, some clearly humanoid. The scent of death is heavy here, because *the egg** requires constant blood baths as it grows. When enough has been sacrificed, *the egg** will hatch. But, for the time being, *the egg** still hungers.

The Silent Threat. Thulyrix fears direct confrontation, especially near *the egg** they care for, so subterfuge and cunning form the core of their methods. It starts with local farmers and villagers going missing: a few at first, but more bones are always needed for the nest and more blood is needed to feed *the egg**. As the need grows, Thulyrix works through intermediaries: bounty hunters, mercenaries, **cultists**, and other damaged souls who can quietly bring victims to the nest and their terrible fate. Any adventures seeking out Thulyrix and *the egg** likely encounter these vicious and secretive groups first.

Roleplaying Thulyrix

Thulyrix is a being of single-minded devotion. No one, not even themselves, is more important than *the egg**. They feel no remorse over the victims sacrificed to *the egg** and used to build its nest—the dead are completely insignificant when compared to *the egg**. Countless worlds border the Ethereal Plane; Thulyrix's choice of home, when selecting a world, revolves solely around *the egg** and its need for nourishment.

Alien and unknowable, Thulyrix is not even remotely familiar to the natives of the Material Plane. Thulyrix never speaks audibly and may not even be capable of doing so, but if directly confronted, they reveal that they can communicate directly into the minds of those they can see with their opalescent eyes. Conversation with Thulyrix is unnerving and invasive; while they see most humanoids as little more than prey, they also display a deep curiosity. But the longer one listens to Thulyrix's whispers in their head, the sooner they realize that Thulyrix is simply measuring up the next victim and judging how nourishing a meal their soul will be to *the egg** under their care.

Thulyrix's Tactics

Though Thulyrix is strongest near the nest, they fear direct confrontation, especially in close proximity to *the egg**. Thulyrix stalks lone victims, entrancing them with their scintillating eyes and telepathic words and commanding them to travel to the nest under a geas. Eventually, when the egg's need for blood grows exponentially, they enchant ruthless mercenary captains, charismatic occultists, or desperate con artists and use these pawns to bring sacrifices to the nest for them. An adventuring party's first confrontations with Thulyrix may be through these networks of minions, because Thulyrix wishes to remain a secret and keep any threat far from the nest.

If pressed into a desperate defense of the nest, Thulyrix is a cold, merciless killer who gives no quarter. Thulyrix attempts to dominate a powerful threat and turn them against their allies, sowing division and confusion early in the conflict. They then use a combination of their innate spellcasting abilities and lair actions to try to control the battlefield, disorienting and separating their enemies. When their enemies are confused and scattered, Thulyrix darts around the fray by flying or using *misty step*, striking with their claws and retreating until all the threats are dead or have fled. Should any threats escape, Thulyrix hunts them down, seeking to track them with their Chosen Prey ability or through their network of minions, not resting until the secret of *the egg** and its location are safe.

They wear unusual bracers that look like silvery veins coursing over their leathery skin. They function as *bracers of defense*. When Thulyrix perishes, these bracers shift to a liquid form and solidify into a palm-sized, silvery coin. If someone else attunes to the coin, it liquifies and crawls up their arms, shifting into similar silver veins. This is not a harmful effect.

Thulyrix's Traits

Ideal. "Under my care, *the egg** will hatch and greatness will be ushered into the multiverse."

Bond. "*The egg** is all that matters. I am nothing compared to it. I devote everything I have to it."

Flaw. "The natives of the Material Plane are prey—food for the egg—and nothing more."

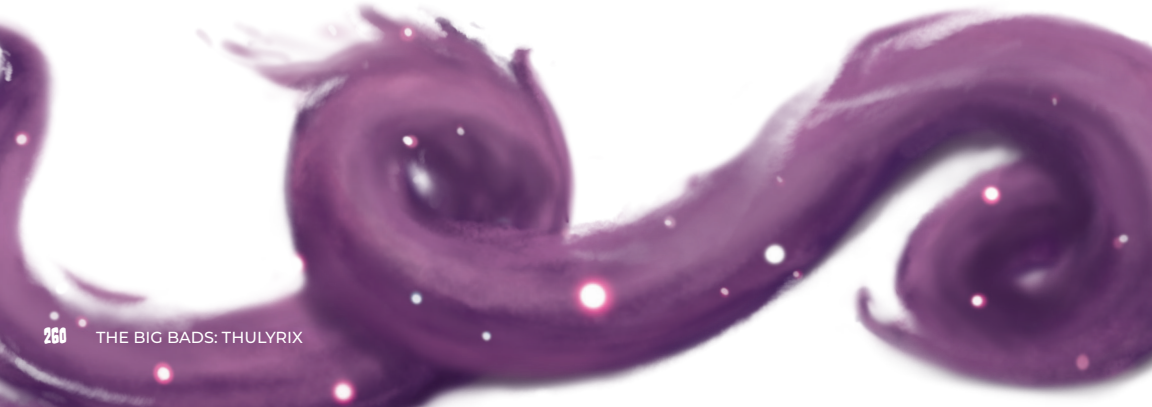
Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Thulyrix the Liminal in your campaign.

The Cult of the Silver Egg. A small, secluded village bears a dark secret: a hidden cult that serves Thulyrix and *the egg**. Townsfolk have been disappearing, and when the mayor's own daughter vanishes, she offers the party a reward to find her.

Whispers of the Lost. In the wilderness not far from Thulyrix's nest, the land itself is haunted by sacrifices made to *the egg**. Ghostly visions visit the party during the night when they camp close by, showing them glimpses of a towering nest in the mountains and a shining orb perched on top.

Witch Hunt. During a stop at a small village, the party learns about a blight that is killing nearby flora, including crops important to the villagers. They blame the problem on a "witch" who has recently settled nearby. They offer to pay their collected savings to whoever will slay the witch. The witch, however, is a druid also investigating the blight, which is caused by Thulyrix's lair.



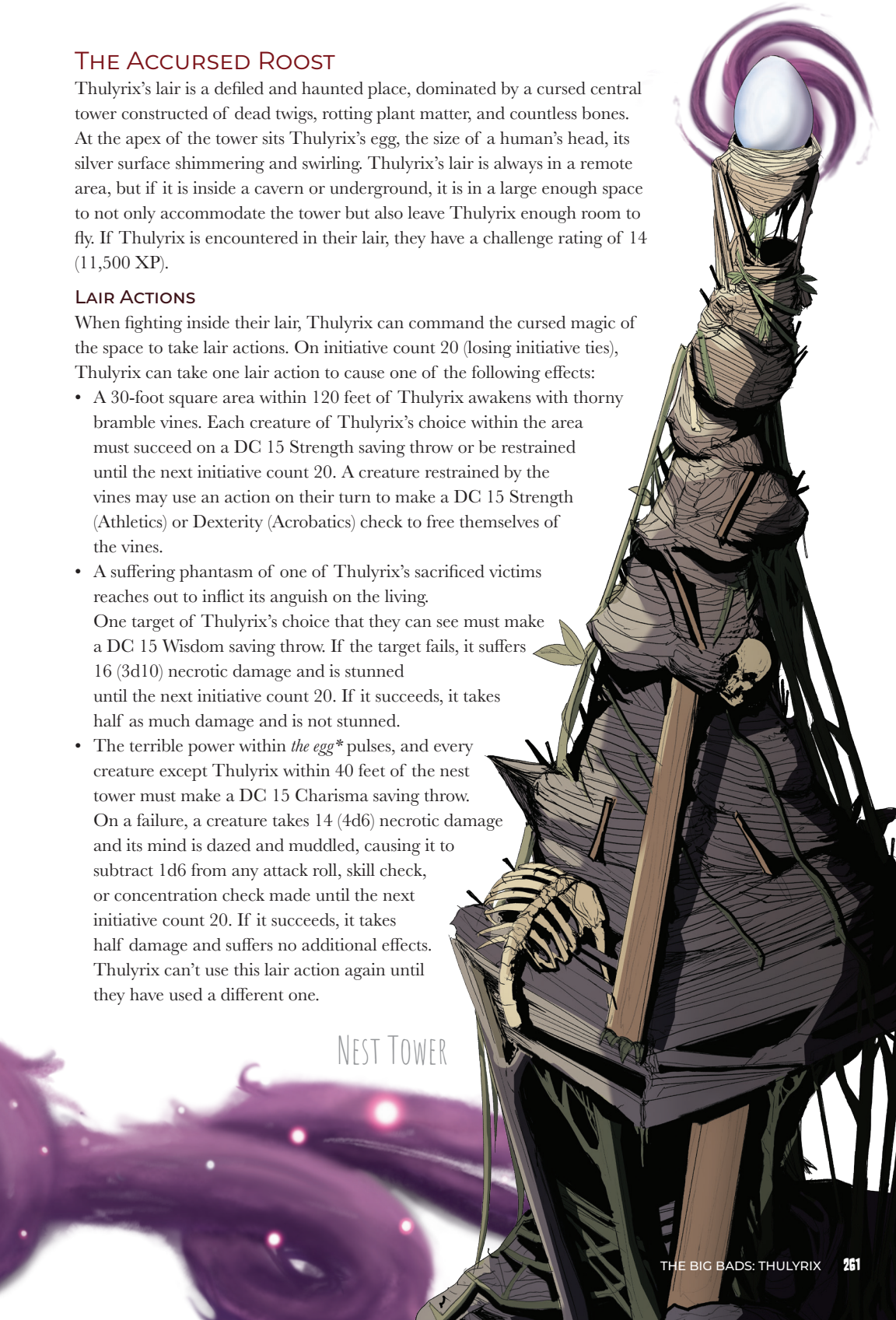
The Accursed Roost

Thulyrix's lair is a defiled and haunted place, dominated by a cursed central tower constructed of dead twigs, rotting plant matter, and countless bones. At the apex of the tower sits Thulyrix's egg, the size of a human's head, its silver surface shimmering and swirling. Thulyrix's lair is always in a remote area, but if it is inside a cavern or underground, it is in a large enough space to not only accommodate the tower but also leave Thulyrix enough room to fly. If Thulyrix is encountered in their lair, they have a challenge rating of 14 (11,500 XP).

Lair Actions

When fighting inside their lair, Thulyrix can command the cursed magic of the space to take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Thulyrix can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- A 30-foot square area within 120 feet of Thulyrix awakens with thorny bramble vines. Each creature of Thulyrix's choice within the area must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be restrained until the next initiative count 20. A creature restrained by the vines may use an action on their turn to make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to free themselves of the vines.
- A suffering phantasm of one of Thulyrix's sacrificed victims reaches out to inflict its anguish on the living. One target of Thulyrix's choice that they can see must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. If the target fails, it suffers 16 (3d10) necrotic damage and is stunned until the next initiative count 20. If it succeeds, it takes half as much damage and is not stunned.
- The terrible power within *the egg** pulses, and every creature except Thulyrix within 40 feet of the nest tower must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 14 (4d6) necrotic damage and its mind is dazed and muddled, causing it to subtract 1d6 from any attack roll, skill check, or concentration check made until the next initiative count 20. If it succeeds, it takes half damage and suffers no additional effects. Thulyrix can't use this lair action again until they have used a different one.



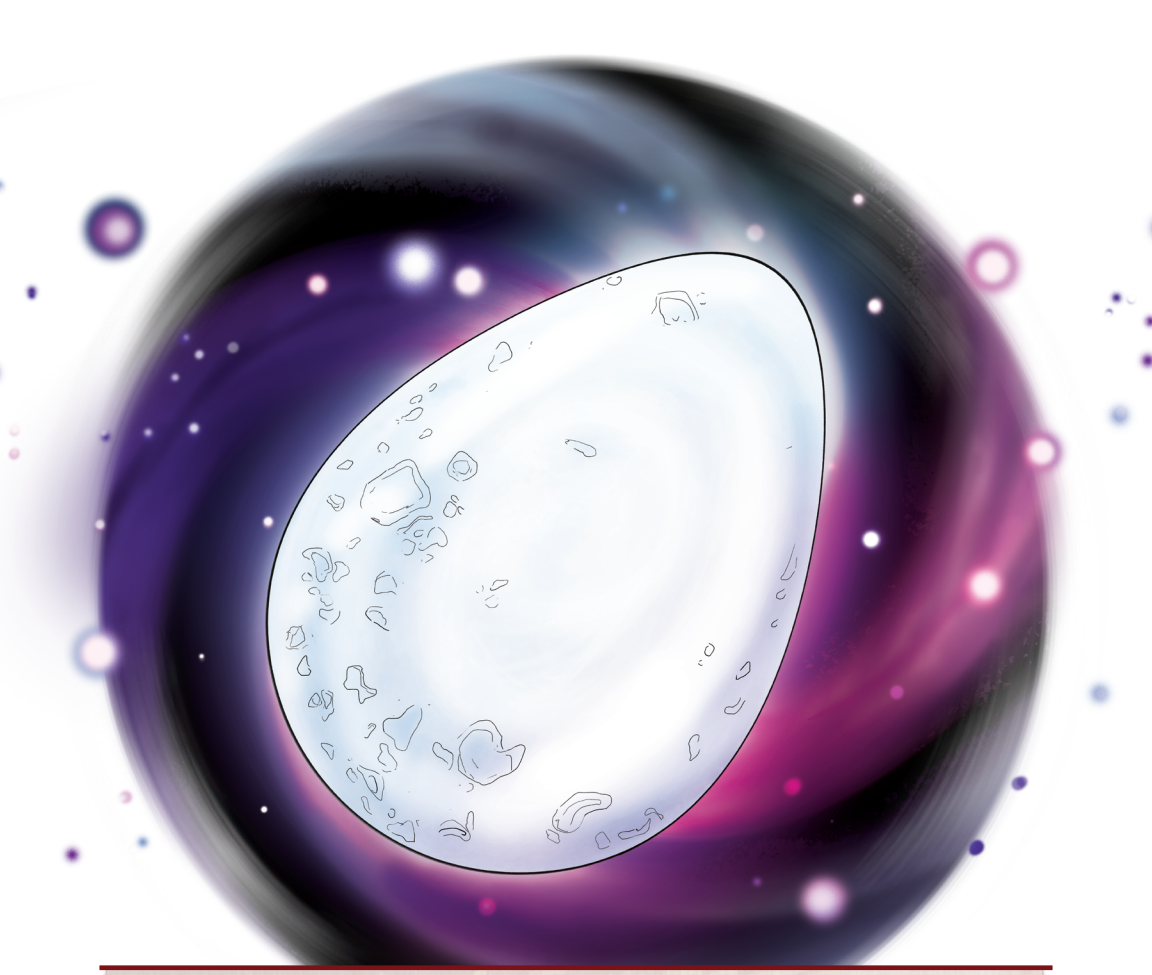
Nest Tower

Regional Effects

The region surrounding the nest tower is desecrated and haunted, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- Within 1 mile of the nest tower, plant life struggles to survive. Flowers wither and trees are gnarled and leafless. Any grass is brown and dry. The only flora that thrives here are thorny brambles and strangling vines.
- Within 1 mile of the nest tower, raptor birds act as eyes for Thulyrix. Travelers in this region feel like they are constantly being watched, and they frequently spot owls, hawks, and other birds of prey staring down at them from withered branches.
- Anyone sleeping within 1 mile of the nest tower suffers from disturbing nightmares featuring Thulyrix, *the egg** it protects, or ghostly phantasms of Thulyrix's sacrifice victims.
- If Thulyrix dies, the nest tower is destroyed, or the egg is destroyed or removed from the area, these regional effects fade over the course of 3d10 days.

Cultist of The Egg



THE EGG

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

*The egg** is the size of a human's head, it's cold to the touch, and its surface is silvery and swirls slowly with mesmerizing patterns. While attuned to the egg, you gain the ability to cast *blink*, *gaseous form*, or *hypnotic pattern* (spell save DC 18) up to three times per day.

You also gain the ability to cast *dominate person* once per day. However, each time you use the this ability, you must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. If you fail, you fall under the effect of a *geas* spell, compelled to protect the egg, build a new nest tower for it, and sacrifice other lives to *the egg** until it hatches. If this *geas* is broken by a *remove curse*, *greater restoration*, or *wish* spell, the attunement and abilities from *the egg** are also lost. You do not need to possess *the egg** on your person to use the abilities it grants as long as *the egg** is on the same plane of existence as you.

It is possible to destroy *the egg**. It has an AC of 21 and 30 hit points, but it is immune to nonmagical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing attacks. If destroyed, *the egg** liquifies into a mercurial liquid that constantly emits a misty vapor. This liquid can be collected and used as six doses of oil of etherealness or can be a valuable component in crafting certain magical items such as *plate armor of etherealness.*

It is unknown what happens if *the egg** is allowed to hatch or how long that process may take. GMs are encouraged to be creative. The result should be terrifying and more dangerous even than Thulyrix.

THULYRIX

ETHEREAL OCCULTIST GUARDIAN

Medium aberration, neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (*bracers of defense*)
Hit Points 150 (20d8 + 60)
Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Int +10, Wis +9, Cha +10

Skills Arcana +9, Insight +9, Perception +9, Stealth +10

Damage Resistances necrotic, psychic

Condition Immunities prone

Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Special Equipment. Thulyrix wears *bracers of defense* and carries *the egg**.
Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Thulyrix fails a saving throw, they can choose to succeed instead.
Innate Spellcasting. Thulyrix's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 18). They can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *fog cloud, hold person, misty step*

3/day: *blink, black tentacles, hypnotic pattern*

1/day: *dominate person, geas*

Actions

Multiattack. Thulyrix makes two claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee weapon attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

Predator's Shroud (Recharge 5–6). Thulyrix psychically targets up to four creatures that they can see, filling them with a dreadful sense that they are prey. Each target must make a DC 18 Intelligence saving throw. On a failed save, a target takes 36 (8d8) psychic damage and can't take reactions until the end of Thulyrix's next turn. On a successful save, a target takes half as much damage and suffers no other effects.

Reactions

Discorporate. When hit by an attack, Thulyrix can partially phase into the border ethereal, halving the damage they take from the attack.

Legendary Actions

Thulyrix can take 3 legendary actions. They can take only one legendary action option at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Thulyrix regains spent legendary actions at the start of their turn.

Claw Attack. Thulyrix makes one claw attack.

Misty Step. Thulyrix uses their innate *misty step* spell.

Chosen Prey (Costs 2 Actions). Thulyrix targets one creature within 120 feet that they can see. The target must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, it is marked as Thulyrix's prey for up to 8 hours. While a target is marked, Thulyrix can choose to make a claw attack against that target with advantage, but if they choose to do so, the ability ends. Additionally, while a target is marked as Thulyrix's chosen prey, Thulyrix can sense what direction and approximately how far away they are, as long as Thulyrix and the target are on the same plane of existence. If a creature's saving throw is successful, it is immune to Thulyrix's Chosen Prey for the next 24 hours.

TUSSENTENNER

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 004	ALIAS: Lycanthropic Hill Giant
SIZE: Huge	TYPE: Giant
DANGER LEVEL: 8	DEMEANOR: Hairy & Scary

WARNING:

TO HIM, EVERYTHING IS BITE SIZED

NOTES:

Now, Tussentenner is what we call a BIG Big Bad. Half giant, half big bad wolf—all bad news.

-Chief Runcible Scowler

Concept: Ben Huffman
Writing & Game Design: Ben Huffman, TR Rowe, Jordan Richer
Original Cover: Henrik Rosenborg
Illustrations: Jeff Miracola

THE HILLS HAVE TEETH!

Who's afraid of the dumb hill brute?
No, not man, with minds so astute.
Stomping, clomping, clumsy and loud
By simple beasts we won't be cowed.
But heed the tale: "Hill Dwarf" forsworn
From his rage was
"Thousand Teeth" born.
Stalking hillsides, hunting his kin
Beware the wolf in giant's skin!

Composition discovered on the crushed body of Talia Rouse, Giant-obsessed bard

Tussentenner, Lycanthropic Hill Giant

On a densely wooded stretch of hills, atop the bones of a massacred hill giant village, Jarl **Tussentenner** rules over a growing tribe of lycanthropes. Though giants are normally immune to the disease, Tussentenner is a hill giant cursed with lycanthropy. Consumed by hatred and hunger, Tussentenner has become a legend among shapechangers, a bane to other giants, and a fearsome foe for anyone foolish enough to offend him.

Dire Circumstances. Before he was jarl of his own tribe, Tussentenner had another name: Haugdverg. In Giant, this name means "hill dwarf," a grave insult to any giant, given that their social standing is synonymous with their size. No matter how much he ate, Haugdverg remained slim by hill giant standards and thus was the constant target of scorn. Pushed to the limit by ceaseless ridicule, Haugdverg decided if he couldn't earn the respect of his tribe with his girth, he would instead seize leadership by killing his brother Rutor, jarl of the hill giant tribe, and ensure no one ever mocked him again.

In the dead of night, while Rutor lay sleeping, Haugdverg attacked. The assassination might have been successful had the smaller giant not made such a racket or attacked while the rest of the tribe was nearby. Swiftly awoken by Haugdverg's clumsy, ill-devised plan, Rutor easily overcame his younger brother, more amused than angered by the sad attempt.

Exile. As punishment for crimes against his kin, Haugdverg was exiled from the tribe with a chorus of laughter and jeers bidding him good riddance. They imposed a hunting ban on him, further stoking his burning hatred for his fellow hill giants. "After all," they mocked as they sent him away, "Haugdverg must keep his trim figure."

Knowing nothing but hunting yet restricted by the ban, a hungry Haugdverg resorted to eating whatever plants he could get his hands on, inevitably poisoning himself when he accidentally consumed a violet fungus. Alone and weakened, the vulnerable hill giant found himself under attack by a dire wolf. Beneath the full moon, the wolf and the giant struggled, each sustaining grievous injuries. Haugdverg managed to outlast the beast by squeezing into a narrow crevice which would have been too small for a regular hill giant, then blocking the way with a boulder and waiting until the dire wolf bled to death. Near death himself, the hill giant decided to indulge in one last meal and subsequently consumed the dire wolf's corpse. He assumed the blackness that came upon him next was the cold welcome of death.

Wererat

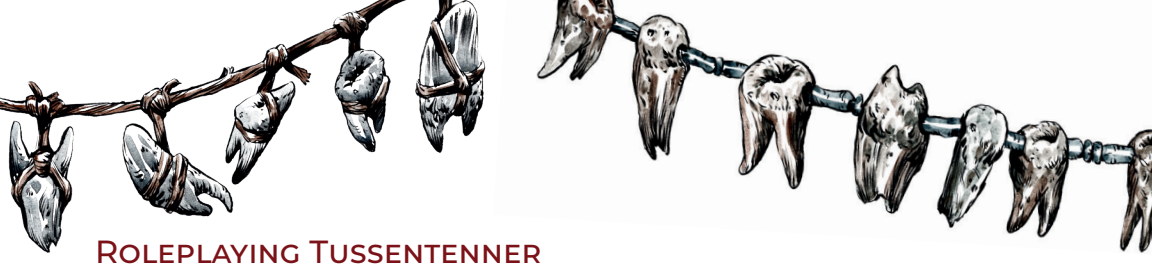
The Wolf Within. Days later, Haugdverg was shocked to awaken and discover he had survived and contracted lycanthropy. In the weeks that followed, driven by an insatiable hunger and imbued with superior senses, he ignored the hunting ban, killing and eating any creature he could get his claws on. Rumors of a giant werewolf spread through the region, drawing other lycanthropes to Haugdverg's side. He introduced himself to these new followers as Tussentenner, loosely translated as "thousand teeth" in Giant, shedding his old name that was used to humiliate him.

Hungry for revenge and knowing his old tribe would come for him eventually for breaking the hunting ban, Tussentenner seized the initiative. He took his makeshift band of shapechangers and launched a full-scale assault on his old tribe. In the bloody aftermath of the slaughter of the hill giants, Tussentenner feasted on the flesh of Rutor and gave himself the title of jarl, self-appointed leader of a rabble of shapechangers which came to be known as the "Tussenstomm."

Hatred for His Kin. Jarl Tussentenner is motivated by his hatred of giants—especially **hill giants**. Whenever he gets word of a giant passing through his territory, Tussentenner leads a hunting pack to dispatch the interloper. He's happy to have the help of his tribe when wearing down a giant but insists on striking the final blow.

Unleashed Animals. Despite his self-proclaimed title, Jarl Tussentenner does very little to govern his Tussenstomm. With local humanoid settlements terrified by his very existence, Tussentenner has created a safe place for lycanthropes to gather and hunt. This is by coincidence, though, rather than by design. He offers little to his tribe and asks for even less in return. So long as they keep him well fed, assault giants with him whenever he orders, and show him proper recognition, he doesn't intervene in their affairs. As a result, feuds have begun to break out between his followers, and the shapechangers are growing bolder, running wild and pushing into neighboring territories. If the jarl doesn't rein his tribe in soon and take an active role in leadership, the trouble his Tussenstomm causes could bring danger to his door.

Werewolf



Roleplaying Tussentenner

Tussentenner is a simple creature, incapable of creating complex plans or exercising guile. His day-to-day routine consists primarily of eating, lying around until he falls asleep, then eating again. Few things rouse him to action, but he always responds to perceived disrespect—especially regarding his size—and the presence of giants.

Jarl Tussentenner is full of self-doubt that would be pitiable in a creature less prone to explosive violence. Comments insinuating that he is smaller than he ought to be, or smaller than other giants, are particularly enraging for the jarl. When he believes he has been disrespected, his first instinct is to mimic the behavior of his hill giant tormentors by bullying and intimidating the creatures who disrespect him. This almost always escalates into violence. When so provoked, Tussentenner goes far beyond exacting retribution for the disrespect—the insolent creature's companions, allies, and even nearby unaffiliated parties are likely to get caught up in the jarl's juvenile rage.

If Tussentenner ever felt he was losing his control of his Tussenstomm, he would be similarly motivated by feelings of inadequacy. Rather than directing his rage toward his fellow shapechangers, he would lead them on violent raids, destroying entire settlements, then feast on the fallen. With a lifetime of rejection prior to contracting lycanthropy, Jarl Tussentenner depends on the deference of his tribe to prop up his fragile ego.

When the jarl becomes aware of a fellow giant in the vicinity, he sees an opportunity to exact further revenge on his kin. He takes great delight in using his werewolf form to track and eliminate other giants. After subduing his prey, Tussentenner gloats over his victim, hurling insults primarily based on the victim's size relative to his own. When Tussentenner bores of bullying, which he quickly does, he executes the subdued giant and feasts on its corpse.

Jarl Tussentenner's uncontrollable rage when disrespected or confronted with the presence of a fellow giant, combined with his limited intelligence and self-restraint, means savvy adventurers may find the jarl easy to manipulate. Those who show the giant werewolf excessive respect or aid in killing or repelling giants from his territory are likely to survive their encounter with the jarl. Despite that, nothing can truly engender generosity from Jarl Tussentenner. He is simply too self-centered and shortsighted to see the benefits of showing others the respect he so badly craves.

Tussentenner's Tactics

No well-adjusted, intelligent creature would ever mistake Jarl Tussentenner for a good leader. He is lazy, gluttonous, and easily flies into a rage. Though Tuessentenner professes a desire to take his Tussenstomm hunting for new flesh, as game has grown scarce in his region, he's spent months lazing about his lair, eating rotten hill giant corpses and the remains of the few adventurers who have come to threaten him. Jarl Tussentenner enjoys plotting future conquests, but he's much too indolent to execute them.

When intruders enter his village, if they aren't giants, Jarl Tussentenner prefers to let his tribe of **werewolves**, **wererats**, and **wereboars** deal with them. If his Tussenstomm isn't capable of handling the adversaries, he loudly announces his intention to protect the tribe and joins the fight. Tussentenner sees every fight as an opportunity to prove he's a legitimate giant. For this reason, it's easy to provoke him into overextending himself or committing to an attack even when he is at a serious disadvantage. The jarl would never consider surrendering or pleading for his life when dealing with an opponent smaller than him. In that circumstance, he always fights to the death.

Oversized Lycanthropy

It is considered next to impossible for a non-humanoid creature to fall victim to the moon's curse, but Tussentenner's existence is evidence that fate can sometimes be fickle.

Only a lycanthrope of considerable potency would be able to transfer the curse to a creature as hearty as a hill giant. The dire wolf that bit Tussentenner was one of great lycanthropic power, perhaps even the progenitor of a long line of werewolves.

The strange circumstances that have allowed Tussentenner to become a werewolf have also granted him the means to pass lycanthropy on to other giants, although the likelihood is considerably reduced compared to infecting humanoids. Should a giant be hit by Tussentenner's Bite attack and fail the Constitution save, there is a 10% chance the giant will contract werewolf lycanthropy.

Tussentenner's habit of attacking without strategizing—and outright killing anyone he gets into a fight with—means that he has sired very few lycanthropes himself. Should he ever realize he can create more willing servants, his forces might begin to grow exponentially.

Tussentenner Relaxes

Tussentenner's Traits

Ideal. "As long as I live, all giants will suffer for how I was treated by my former tribe."

Bond. "As jarl, attending to the strength of the tribe is my responsibility...when I'm not busy eating, resting, or eating."

Flaw. "When I'm not shown respect, I respond with overwhelming violence."

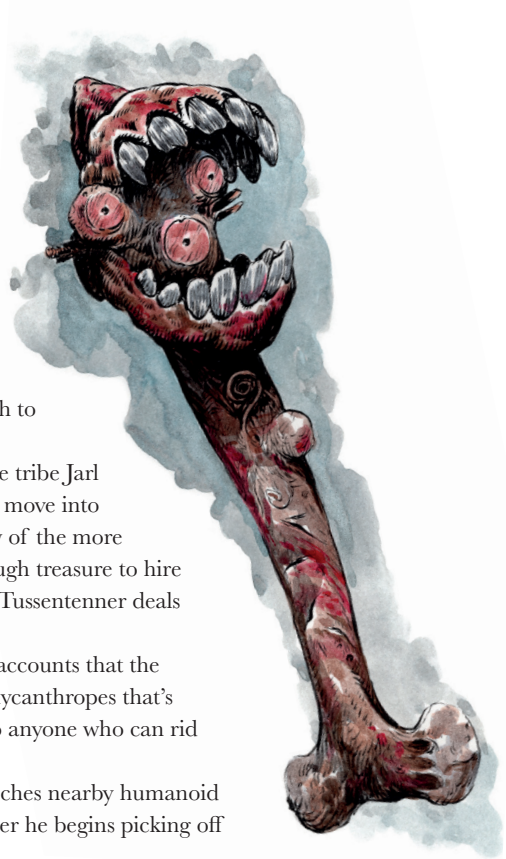
Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Tussentenner in your campaign.

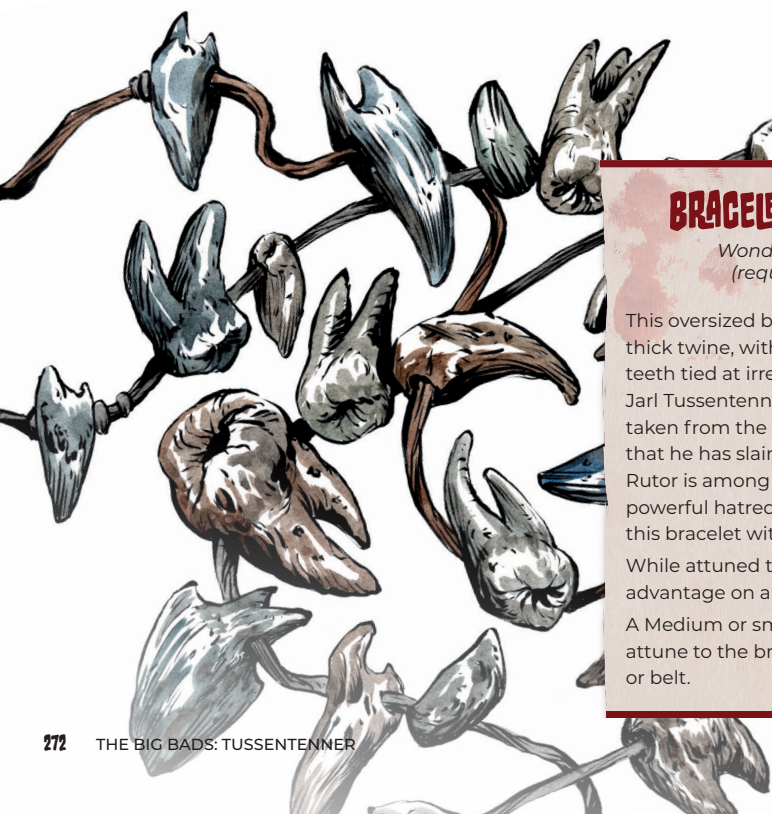
Against the Giants. In the power vacuum left by the tribe Jarl Tussentenner destroyed, two nearby tribes of hill giants move into the region and attempt to claim it for themselves. A few of the more intelligent Tussenstomm members scrape together enough treasure to hire adventurers to rebuke one of the hill giant tribes while Tussentenner deals with the other.

Unlikeable Lycanthropes. A local monarch hears accounts that the countryside has recently become infested by a tribe of lycanthropes that's growing larger by the day. They offer land and a title to anyone who can rid the region of the shapechangers.

With the Giants. A small tribe of stone giants beseeches nearby humanoid settlements for aid in dealing with Jarl Tussentenner after he begins picking off members of their tribe one by one.



The Jarl's Greatclub



Bracelet of Giant Teeth

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

This oversized bracelet consists of 10 feet of thick twine, with dozens of yellowing giant teeth tied at irregular intervals. Unique to Jarl Tussentenner, the teeth are trophies, taken from the mouths of other hill giants that he has slain. A tooth from his brother Rutor is among them. Tussentenner's powerful hatred of his own kind has imbued this bracelet with an enchantment.

While attuned to this item, the wearer has advantage on all attacks against giants.

A Medium or smaller creature that wishes to attune to the bracelet must wear it as a scarf or belt.

The Jarl's Stomping Ground

Tussentenner has established a lair for his Tussenstomm in the ruins of his old hill giant village. While the buildings are larger than most of his lycanthrope tribe needs, they are also in much better repair now that they are tended by creatures more intelligent than the average hill giant. When Jarl Tussentenner slew his old tribe, he discarded their bones on the ground as he cannibalized them. They remain strewn about the village, a gruesome reminder of the depths of Tussentenner's hatred for his own kind.

Lair Actions

Tussentenner rules his followers with fear, and his uncanny ability to sway them gives him access to lair actions while in his village. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Tussentenner can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects. He can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- Tussentenner howls, and his Tussenstomm howls back. Each creature who is not deafened and is within 60 feet of Tussentenner must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of him until the end of their next turn.
- Tussentenner commands one of his lycanthropes to join the fight. The lycanthrope appears within 30 feet of Tussentenner, from a previously hidden position, and takes its turn on the same initiative count as Tussentenner. This lycanthrope uses the statistics of a **werewolf**.
- At the seat of his power, those infected with lycanthropy find Tussentenner's commands hard to ignore. Each lycanthrope who is not deafened and is within 60 feet of Tussentenner must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, affected creatures must obey Tussentenner as if he had targeted them with the *command* spell and they had failed the saving throw.

Regional Effects

The region surrounding Jarl Tussentenner's lair is transformed by his powerful lycanthropy and the ravages of his Tussenstomm, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- Creatures within 1 mile of the jarl's lair have disadvantage on saving throws against contracting lycanthropy.
- Due to an increased number of hungry lycanthropes, game animals are scarce. Finding something suitable to hunt within 1 mile of the jarl's lair requires a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check. What wild animals do remain within 5 miles of the jarl's lair are unusually aggressive, attacking even when they have recently fed and fighting to the death rather than fleeing a losing fight.
- The beasts of the region carry word to Jarl Tussentenner when his hated kin draw near. He knows the direction and distance of all giants within 5 miles of his lair.

If Tussentenner dies, the regional effect making game animals scarce and more aggressive ends in 2d12 months, but the other regional effects fade immediately.

TUSSENTENNER

VENGEFUL LYCANTHROPIC HILL GIANT

Huge giant (giant, shapechanger), chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor) in giant form, 14 (natural armor) in wolf or hybrid form
Hit Points 126 (12d12 + 48)
Speed 40 ft. (50 ft. in dire wolf form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	8 (−1)	19 (+4)	7 (−2)	8 (−1)	7 (−2)

Saving Throws Con +7

Skills Animal Handling +5, Athletics +8, Intimidation +4, Perception +2

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Giant (can't speak in wolf form)

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Special Equipment. Tussentenner is attuned to a *bracelet of giant teeth**, wrapped around his right arm and granting him advantage on all attack rolls made against other giants.

Hatred of Giants. When Tussentenner deals damage with a weapon attack against a giant, he deals an additional 5 (1d10) damage.

Keen Hearing and Smell. Tussentenner has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If Tussentenner fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Regeneration. Tussentenner regains 5 hit points at the start of his turn. If he has taken damage from a silvered weapon, this trait doesn't function at the start of his next turn. Jarl Tussentenner dies only if he starts his turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Shapechanger. Tussentenner can use his action to polymorph into a wolf–giant hybrid, a Huge dire wolf, or back into his true form, which is giant. His statistics, other than his AC, are the same in each form. Any equipment he is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. Jarl Tussentenner reverts to his true form if he dies.

Actions

Multiattack (Giant or Hybrid Form Only). Tussentenner makes one bite and one claws attack in hybrid form, or two greatclub attacks in giant or hybrid form.

Bite (Dire Wolf or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage. If the target is a humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with werewolf lycanthropy. A giant that is hit by this attack must also make the Constitution saving throw but only has a 10 percent chance of actually becoming cursed on a failure.

Claws (Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Greatclub (Giant or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (3d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Rock (Giant or Hybrid Form Only). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Legendary Actions

Tussentenner can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Tussentenner regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Bite (Dire Wolf or Hybrid Form Only). Tussentenner makes one bite attack.

Change Shape. Tussentenner polymorphs into a wolf–giant hybrid, a Huge dire wolf, or back into his true form as a giant.

Move. Tussentenner moves up to his speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

VELLAI-AXAL

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 019	ALIAS: The Tide-Eater
SIZE: Gargantuan	TYPE: Aberration
DANGER LEVEL: 21	DEMEANOR: Soakingly Eldritch

WARNING:

DON'T GO IN THE WATER

NOTES:

Any agent who begins to dream about the deep, dark embrace of the waves, please report to me for immediate assistance.

-Dr. Caspian Saari, Department of Charms and Curses

Concept: Yubi Coates
Writing & Game Design: Yubi Coates
Original Cover: Sovereign
Illustrations: Felix Miall

Look Not Beneath the Water

> Captain Arletta Windhunter
> in a note placed in a bottle

There are worlds out there the likes of which you cannot imagine. I don't say this to be facetious or overly mysterious. I mean every word. There are worlds you cannot imagine. Not in some superficial sense, like trying to imagine a new color, but in the way neither your body nor your soul could survive it. These unknowable worlds are not the dead, empty husks you may hope them to be. Life is rarely so kind. Fate is rarely so merciful. No, these vast spaces are filled with life—if you can call the existence of such creatures life. But what else would you call it? What else would you call them?

Your words are not broken enough to describe or understand those places, those things out there. I know this must be confusing. Maybe even frightening. It should be frightening. You cannot truly know this thing, for to do so would undo your very essence. But it knows you.

It sees you.

It's hunting you.

Vellai-axal, The Tide-eater

The Abyss Stares Back and Smiles. No one knows how beings like this come to exist. Some believe they're nightmarish amalgamations born from the souls of those terrified of deep, open water and those who've met their choking ends beneath the waves. Others believe they're older than life itself, and our fear is but a primal awareness of their existence—an ancient knowledge we can never escape.

Most likely we will never know, and perhaps we could never understand anyway. After all, knowing and understanding are two very different things. Luckily for us, these beings tend to stay hidden in the inner and outer planes, leaving the Material Plane alone. Their strange geometry is ill-suited to our world's petty laws of magic and physics.

But sometimes they get *hungry*. Bored. Sometimes, in desperate pursuit of their gnawing desire for destruction, they push through. **Vellai-axal** is one such hungry creature, devoted to the thrill of the hunt.

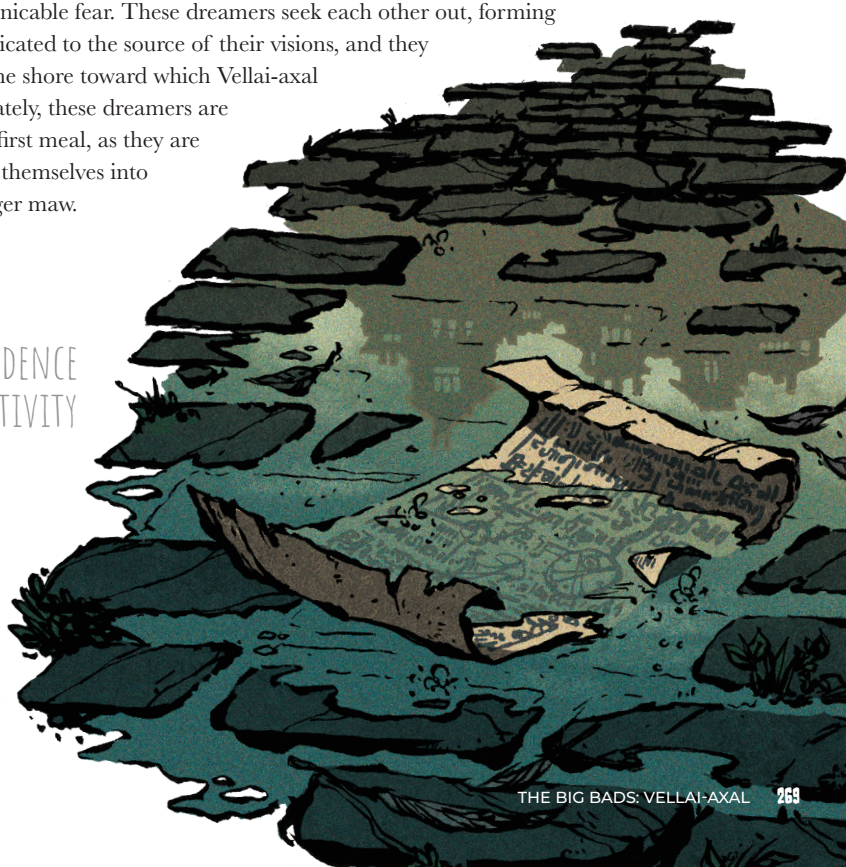
Vellai-axal's Dirge. Vellai-axal has traveled between the planes before by swimming through the currents that bind magic and matter together. It picks remote areas with deep, still water as a temporary

hunting ground. While it cannot communicate in spoken language, it has telepathic abilities and is able to produce a whale-like song. This dirge is laden with eldritch energy and can be heard above the water for miles around, drawing unwitting souls to the edge of the dark water, then down deep into its lair. Much like a lure, Vellai-axal uses this dirge as its primary tool to control and coerce followers before and after it breaches into the Material Plane.

Stories about the haunting, enthralling song have existed for hundreds of years. Some scholars have attempted to transcribe it to parchment or play renditions of it, but none have come close to capturing the beauty and terror contained in its antediluvian melodies. Those who fall prey to the dirge become obsessed, as if plagued by an unquenchable thirst, and inevitably throw themselves into seas or lakes to drown, overwhelmed by their failed attempts at interpreting the dirge.

Ancient Dreams. On top of being able to draw victims to the water with its song, Vellai-axal and its creeping dirge move through the dreams of those who live near its chosen hunting spot. This transference of consciousness begins before it has completely entered the Material Plane. It appears first in the dreams of people with deep fears of water or those who've lost loved ones to drowning, often taking the shape of a humanoid figure—though none can quite describe it. Vellai-axal will speak its name, but the dreamer can never remember or reproduce the exact sounds it makes. The best the dreamers can do is offer a translation, like "The Ancient Song" or "The Underwater Deep." One wizard was able to write down what they swore was the closest approximation they could understand: "Vellai-axal." Sadly, the doomed mage was found dead in their room a few weeks later, their ears torn off, and waves painted in blood all over the walls and floors.

The purpose of these dreams becomes devastatingly clear once Vellai-axal pulls closer to the Material plane. With each visit, the dreamer finds themselves drawn closer to it, speaking fondly of this "figure" and the wondrous things it shows them. They babble about underwater worlds and unbelievable sights. They're also prone to fits of hysterical sobbing and abject, uncommunicable fear. These dreamers seek each other out, forming a cult-like cloister dedicated to the source of their visions, and they often refuse to leave the shore toward which Vellai-axal is traveling. Unfortunately, these dreamers are typically Vellai-axal's first meal, as they are drawn to giddily fling themselves into Vellai-axal's open, eager maw.



Waterlogged Evidence of Eldritch Activity

The Creeping Dream

Vellai-axal is constantly trying to invade the dreams of mortals and, should the characters spend time near Vellai-axal's chosen entry point into the Material Plane, they may find the creature's strange and alien dirge beginning to creep into their minds. Depending on how close Vellai-Axal is to materializing, sleeping near the water it has marked as it's gateway will cause increasingly disturbing and invasive dreams.

Each night that a character spends near Vellai-axal's chosen body of water, they must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. Characters with a phobia of water or who have lost a loved one to drowning make this saving throw at disadvantage. On a failure, the character awakes the following day with their mind stuck in a mental fog and they have disadvantage on all Intelligence and Wisdom based skill checks until the start of their next long rest. A success means the character is immune to the dreams until Vellai-axal begins its materialization into its chosen body of water.

Once Vellai-axal's passage into the Material Plane has begun, the dreams become stronger. The Wisdom saving throw during each long rest becomes DC 18, and a failure causes the character to suffer one point of exhaustion as dreams of cold water fill their waking thoughts. A success means the character is immune to the dreams until Vellai-axal fully materializes.

As soon as Vellai-axal fully materializes in the body of water they have chosen to invade, the dreams reach a crescendo, calling dreamers to join it in the depths. The Wisdom saving throw during each long rest increases to a DC 20, and anyone who has failed at least one of the previous saving throws makes this one at disadvantage. Anyone who fails this saving throw becomes charmed by Vellai-Axal and now has the following additional bond:

> **Bond.** "I belong beneath the waves. Vellai-axal will greet me with many grasping arms. All I want is to find my way into the water."

While someone remains charmed in this way, they will use any opportunity to make their way to the water source where Vellai-axal resides. The charmed character can repeat the saving throw after each long rest, as well as whenever they take damage. The effect can also be removed with the *lesser restoration* spell (or similar magic).

Reading the Depths. In past decades, researchers have successfully prevented this eldritch being from manifesting. Upon identifying a rising tide of disturbing behaviour, some societies employ specialized groups of hunters to strike preemptively.

In one such preventative attempt, Vellai-axal was foiled when a group of hunters enlisted powerful druids to temporarily cover the chosen lake with stone and earth. With access to the water removed and without devotees to prey upon, the aberrant creature was forced to retreat.

This successful resistance, and others like it, have made it much more difficult for Vellai-axal to gather its strength and manifest on the Material Plane. So long as it is confronted before it has amassed its full strength, Vellai-axal can be driven back and forced to abandon its hunt.

A Preemptive Approach. The key to dealing with Vellai-axal is to strike first. A small window of vulnerability, which appears immediately after Vellai-axal has traveled between planes, allows specialist hunters to dive beneath the waves and confront it. Successfully doing so leaves it exhausted and prevents it from hunting again for many years.

Failure to stave off Vellai-axal's hunt leaves little recourse. Its full might, including the ability to conscript enthralled dreamers to aid it, makes it a force too powerful to fight. At full strength it only retreats once it has hunted and devoured its fill of poor, unfortunate souls.

Roleplaying Vellai-axal

At the slimy, fetid core of this writhing mass of eldritch horror and limbs, Vellai-axal behaves most like an anglerfish. It enjoys sowing the seeds of fear and despair and delights in twisting the minds of its victims until they throw themselves into its jaws, reveling in their believed salvation. However, especially before fully breaching through the planes, it is sickeningly aware of its vulnerability.

Those who have been enthralled by Vellai-axal's dirge can be used as mouthpieces by the creature. It can look through their eyes, hear through their ears, and even speak through a thrall—though the words are often strange or garbled. One notable transcript of the words spoken by its victim portrays its eerie influence:

Yes, the water. Ah, the water, endless for diving and crushed, the water—beneath, of course—yes. The water song. Hear me. Sing waves and crush on water beneath and yes, the water. Look. Look, the water.

Vellai-axal manipulates these thralls with dreams and visions, typically leading affected communities to cultivate a deep suspicion of strangers, as it strives to guard its chosen body of water against any who might seek to end its hunt.

Vellai-axal's Tactics

Vellai-axal is deeply aware of its weakened state. In the early stages of manifestation, it aims to drive away would-be heroes until it's at full strength. Through its otherworldly dirge, Vellai-axal beguiles them with visions of calm waters or lashes at them with terrifying nightmares, ensuring enough time passes for its true power to blossom.

The early stages of its invasion depend heavily on Vellai-axal's success in creating its small but obsessed following of "believers." These thralls can prove distressing opponents, as they fight viciously to protect the very beast drawing them in to devour them.

As a rule, Vellai-axal is more cruel than cunning, relying on telepathic magic and eldritch charm for safety. When faced in direct combat before it's at full strength, it panics, fearing its hunt is in jeopardy, and lashes out furiously at foes. During this stage, Vellai-axal is vulnerable to coordinated assaults as it abandons tactics, single-mindedly focusing on the closest or most obvious threat.

When it becomes clear banishment is imminent and the hunt is doomed, the abomination turns feral. Hideous rage drives Vellai-axal to focus its attacks on a single individual, attempting to take a life with a desperation which would seem pitiful if it weren't so deadly.

Vellai-axal's Traits

Ideal. "The hunt is endless, as is my hunger. I devour with delight."

Bond. "This world is my playground, I hunt in it as I see fit, and none shall stop me. I walk between the waves and always will."

Flaw. "I need time to breach into the Material Plane, and until then, I am weakened."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Vellai-axal in your campaign:

Dismal Dreams. One of the party members has a terrible, chilling dream of a vast creature in endless water and a figure beckoning them closer. When they meet with villagers, one is excitedly talking about the exact same dream and insists on showing the character to a huge nearby lake. Another villager asks the party to visit their village, as others have had the same dreams. There are old stories about something evil lurking in dark, still water.

Hunter's Help Wanted. The party are in the area as Vellai-axal begins its final push through to the Material Plane and are contacted by local authorities. The sages meant to perform the final binding ritual were slain by cultists of Vellai-axal, and this creature must be dealt with now. They'll pay handsomely if the party can complete the ritual and dispatch Vellai-axal for good.

Putrid Prophecy. The party are contacted by a known authority figure who has heard some troubling news. The locals around a deep cove have started acting oddly, blocking anyone from entering the town and throwing their livelihoods aside to dedicate themselves to some new god they claim has visited them. But some of the stories are familiar, too similar to the old tales of Vellai-axal, and so an investigation must be launched.

The Drowning Deep

Vellai-axal's lair is always underwater. Anyone wishing to fight the creature needs some way to breathe and fight underwater. These can be provided by interrogating either devout followers or those who want the monstrosity banished.

Regardless of how deep the water is on the Material Plane, the area inhabited by Vellai-axal always takes on endless dimensions beneath the surface. Once the characters are submerged, they find the water disorientating as it becomes unclear which way is up and which way is down.

Lair Actions

Within its lair, Vellai-axal can invoke chaotic magical effects as a defense against invaders. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Vellai-axal can take one of the following lair actions:

- Vellai-axal calls on the swirling, frantic currents from its own world. The water in a 30-foot cube centered on an enemy turns gritty and choking, becoming difficult terrain until initiative count 20 on the next round.
- By turning its awful, evil mind toward an enemy, Vellai-axal can cast command. If a target succeeds on the saving throw, it gains advantage on saving throws against this lair action for the next 24 hours.
- Vellai-axal summons a 10-foot cube of jagged ice shards, centered on a point it can see within 120 feet of it. Each creature within the cube must succeed on a DC 22 Constitution saving throw or take 28 (8d6) cold damage.

Regional Effects

The area around Vellai-axal's lair becomes twisted by its magic, creating one or more of the following eerie effects.

- Water within 1 mile of the lair does not reflect light and is utterly still regardless of wind and tide.
- No matter the composition, the water turns frigid once this foul creature has started to poison it. Additionally, light struggles to penetrate beneath the surface. Even magical sources of light only create dim light within their areas of effect.
- Anyone who drinks water flowing from where Vellai-axal is breaching must succeed on a DC 22 Constitution saving throw or take 3 (1d6) poison damage. They must also rest for an additional hour to gain the full benefits of a short rest, and an additional 2 for a long rest.
- Marine life throws itself from the water in vast numbers as Vellai-axal draws near, littering the shore with suffocating fish carcasses.

VELLAI-AXAL

THE TIDE-EATER

Gargantuan aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 350 (20d20 + 140)
Speed 0 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
27 (+8)	15 (+2)	25 (+7)	23 (+6)	18 (+4)	25 (+7)

Saving Throws Str +15, Con +14, Cha +14

Skills Intimidation +14, Stealth +9

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities cold, poison

Damage Vulnerabilities radiant

Condition Immunities exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 21

Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 21 (33,000 XP)

Amphibious. Vellai-axal can breathe air and water.

Freedom of Movement. Vellai-axal ignores difficult terrain, and magical effects can't reduce its speed or cause it to be restrained. It can spend 5 feet of movement to escape from nonmagical restraints or grapples.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Vellai-axal fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. Vellai-axal has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Innate Spellcasting. Vellai-axal's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 22). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *charm person, confusion, detect magic, major image, suggestion*

3/day each: counterspell, enthrall, dominate person

1/day each: *darkness, feeblemind*

Actions

Multiattack. Vellai-axal makes four attacks: two with its claws, one with its bite, and one with its Reaching Grasp.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d8 + 8) piercing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 22 Strength saving throw or become paralyzed. While paralyzed, the target has disadvantage on all saving throws against Vellai-axal's charm abilities and takes an extra 11 (2d10) points of necrotic damage against its Hunter's Delight legendary action.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d8 + 8) slashing damage.

Reaching Grasp. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 8) bludgeoning damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 18). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained. Vellai-axal can grapple up to ten targets at a time. Vellai-axal can pull a grappled target 60 feet toward it and then use its bite, if it hasn't already.

Teleport. Vellai-axal shifts between the planes to magically teleport up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

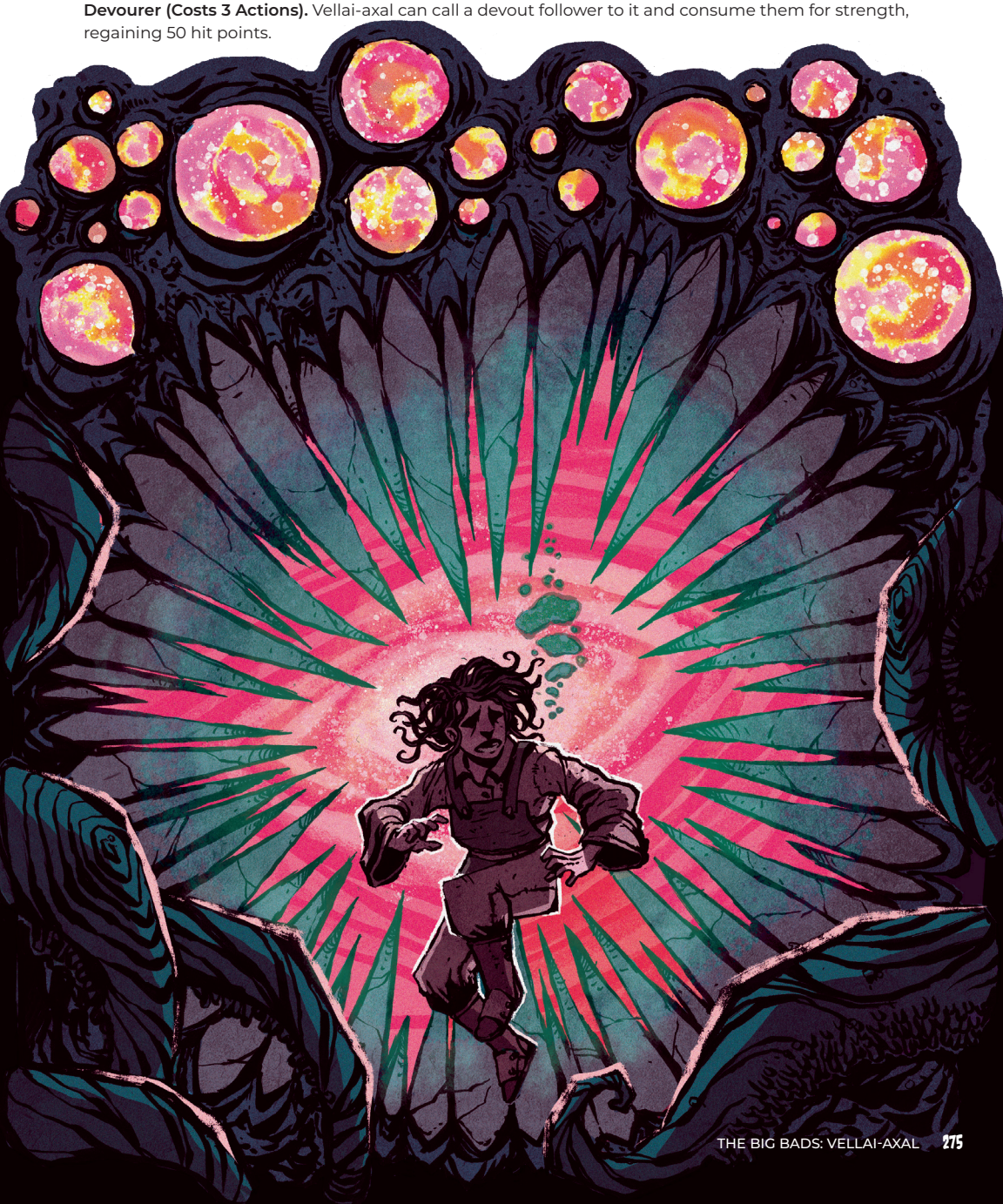
Legendary Actions

Vellai-axal can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Vellai-axal regains all spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Hunter's Delight. Vellai-axal drains the life essence of a creature within 5 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 22 Charisma saving throw or take 15 (3d10) points of necrotic damage, and Vellai-axal regains an equal number of hit points to the damage taken.

Teleport (Costs 2 Actions). Vellai-axal uses its Teleport action.

Devourer (Costs 3 Actions). Vellai-axal can call a devout follower to it and consume them for strength, regaining 50 hit points.



VERREAUX

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 003	ALIAS: Exalted Owlbear
SIZE: Huge	TYPE: Monstrosity
DANGER LEVEL: 8	DEMEANOR: Divinely Arrogant

WARNING:

DON'T MENTION HIS TRAGIC BACKSTORY

NOTES:

To my esteemed colleagues in the Department of Ursine Anomalies, please stop sending Verreaux's file back to my desk. I thought we agreed that an owlBEAR belongs on your docket, not mine.

-Agent Pippi Flock, Department of Avian Adversaries

Concept: Josh Heath
Writing & Game Design: Josh Heath, TR Rowe, Jordan Richer
Original Cover: Joel Holtzman
Illustrations: Kayla Cline

VIOLENCE IS HIS GOSPEL!

> Akwesi Oppong, soldier of the 6th Pioneers
>
> **WHAT WAS THAT?**
>
> *I'll tell you this: in all my years, I've only ever run from one fight. While working as a mercenary I encountered what I thought was a giant, but then I saw its beak and its feathers. And its axe. I'm not ashamed to say I ran without looking back, and I'd do so again.*

Verreaux, the Exalted Owlbear

An owlbear given sentience and self-awareness, **Verreaux** was born as part of an experiment in a lab of horrid aberrations. His earliest memories are of pain, iron cages, and the shrouded silhouettes of his mysterious creators. Lucky for Verreaux, his captors underestimated the owlbear—as their creation grew larger, they failed to reinforce his enclosure. Eventually, the owlbear managed to pry his cage open and escape. Unsure of himself and unfamiliar with the outside world, Verreaux struggled to survive on his own.

He was cunning, though, and took to stalking orcish caravans. He stole from the caravans and listened in on their conversations to teach himself their language. One day, as Verreaux went to pilfer a loaf of freshly baked bread, the warchief, Agnok, caught him. Thinking the odd creature nothing more than a mindless beast, Agnok went to strike the owlbear down. But, in eavesdropping on the orc's conversations, Verreaux had learned not just their language, but also their tactics. Rearing back on his hindlegs, Verreaux easily evaded the swing of the warchief's axe and struck Agnok a deadly blow. And when the orc priests raised weapons against him, Verreaux took up Agnok's axe and struck down all but one of them. The orcs, after witnessing the destruction of their mighty chief and most of their priests, believed the enormous owlbear to be a vengeful demigod—a notion Verreaux heartily encouraged. They bowed down to Verreaux, accepting him as both their new warchief and their god, and his reign of terror began in earnest.

Apotheosis. After a decade of Verreaux's leadership, his clan has thrived. They hold dominion over multiple territories, and several other clans offer fealty to Verreaux and his people. Though Verreaux is an owlbear, his ferocity and battle prowess have made him a god amongst the orc clans, and he gains power, food, and tribute from their worship. While his recognized divinity is far less than that of other gods, it does allow him to impart power on his followers and curses on his enemies. As his numbers increase so too does his power and his pride, and other divine forces are turning their eyes to Verreaux. Should his twisted rise to godhood go unchecked, there is no telling what he may become capable of.

Conquering Horde. As the leader of a conquering horde, Verreaux has powerful resources at his beck and call. Even so, he enjoys being at the front line of battle, and his people cheer him on with drums and hymns extolling his prowess. He is usually surrounded by a squad of orc warriors whom he has carefully chosen to stand alongside him in battle, and they're willing to give their lives.

Roleplaying Verreaux

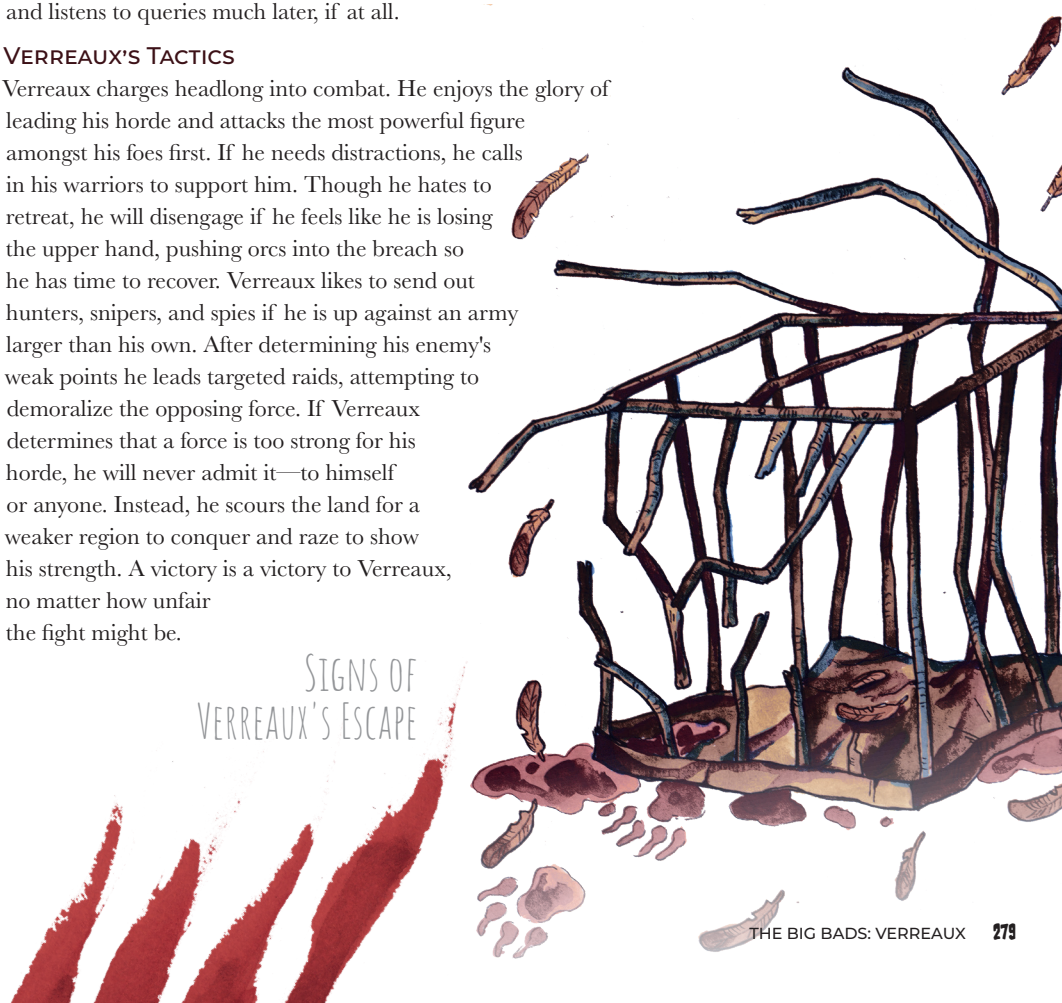
Years of glorification have convinced Verreaux that he is in fact a god, and with his devotees multiplying by the day, true ascension may very well be at hand. The orc hordes who serve him have worshipped him actively for the last decade, and he appears to be gaining divine power from their veneration. Secretly, Verreaux wonders about his origins, and he's enraged by the fact that he will never truly know why he was created.

While he attempts to restrain his anger around those who worship him, at times his rage causes him to kill an impertinent orc or two. His followers view this as righteous wrath, assuming that the person killed was unworthy or did something abhorrent to their living god. Deep down Verreaux feels small amounts of guilt when these unintentional deaths happen. However, he masks this with more anger.

Never charming, polite, or willing to debate or negotiate, Verreaux views such things as beneath him. He has no carnal desire and cannot be charmed or flattered. If given the opportunity to incorporate other beings into his horde, he accepts them without question. Verreaux swings first and listens to queries much later, if at all.

Verreaux's Tactics

Verreaux charges headlong into combat. He enjoys the glory of leading his horde and attacks the most powerful figure amongst his foes first. If he needs distractions, he calls in his warriors to support him. Though he hates to retreat, he will disengage if he feels like he is losing the upper hand, pushing orcs into the breach so he has time to recover. Verreaux likes to send out hunters, snipers, and spies if he is up against an army larger than his own. After determining his enemy's weak points he leads targeted raids, attempting to demoralize the opposing force. If Verreaux determines that a force is too strong for his horde, he will never admit it—to himself or anyone. Instead, he scours the land for a weaker region to conquer and raze to show his strength. A victory is a victory to Verreaux, no matter how unfair the fight might be.



Verreaux's Traits

Ideal. "I will dominate the world and prove I am much more than an experiment."

Bond. "Settling the petty issues of the orc tribes ensures their loyalty, as does proving I can destroy them all if they step out of line."

Flaw. "I am a GOD! I will not be treated like a simple being or one of lesser status."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Verreaux in your campaign.

Stop the God's Advance. An exiled member of Verreaux's horde seeks out support to end the owlbear's bloody rampage. She believes bringing evidence that Verreaux's creators are dead will dissuade him from further attacks.

A Missing Pet. A lurching figure with an ever-shifting form approaches a group of adventurers peacefully. It asks them to assist it in recovering a powerful creature that it created long ago. That creature is Verreaux.

Holy Intervention. An angel, sent by the local pantheon, appears to the party and beseeches them to help stop Verreaux's ascension.

A Place of Worship

Traveling Altar. Verreaux keeps a large tent in the center of his tribe's war camps. His guards are staged around the tent while camped, even when Verreaux is not inside. When the clan is on the move, this tent is packed in its own cart and protected. Wherever the clan settles, an altar is established outside Verreaux's tent, and his supplicants leave trinkets, food, and random gifts there on a regular basis. He's particularly fond of baked goods.

Hordes of Orcs. At any given time, there are between three thousand and five thousand orcs serving in Verreaux's horde. The fluctuation is due to deaths, new converts, and the integration of other hordes. Verreaux's clan includes priests called **Verreaux's chosen**, warriors, and the wondrous skalds of orc tradition.

Verreaux's Gospel

Weapon (greataxe), very rare (requires attunement)

This greataxe was crafted from the melted remains of Agnok's weapon. You have a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. While carrying it, you have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and a +1 bonus to Constitution and Wisdom saving throws. While you are attuned to *Verreaux's gospel**, if you fail a saving throw, you can choose to succeed instead. Once you have used this property, you can't use it again until you have completed a long rest.

Of The Foolish & The Faithful

Great Verreaux was born from the bones and blood of conquered gods. He came to us speaking of a place where the shattered pieces of defeated deities were reassembled, their most powerful qualities stitched together, into Verreaux. At first, we foolish orcs believed Verreaux was simply a beast, a brute of no greater brains or authority than any other creature of the woods. Even after seeing the monstrous owlbear destroy our warchief, we still didn't believe. And so we priests challenged Verreaux and were summarily struck down. The prayers to our gods fell on deaf ears. Our spells were uttered in vain.

After losing my left hand in that ill-advised attack, and seeing my fellow priests fall, I saw the light and threw myself before our lord's feet, begging forgiveness for my ignorance and my lack of faith.
He did not kill me for failing to recognize his divinity, as he should have. Instead, our great god blessed me. I was healed, and more than that, I grew stronger. Since that day I have followed Verreaux into countless battles. I have felt his blessings, and I have seen them bestowed on others.

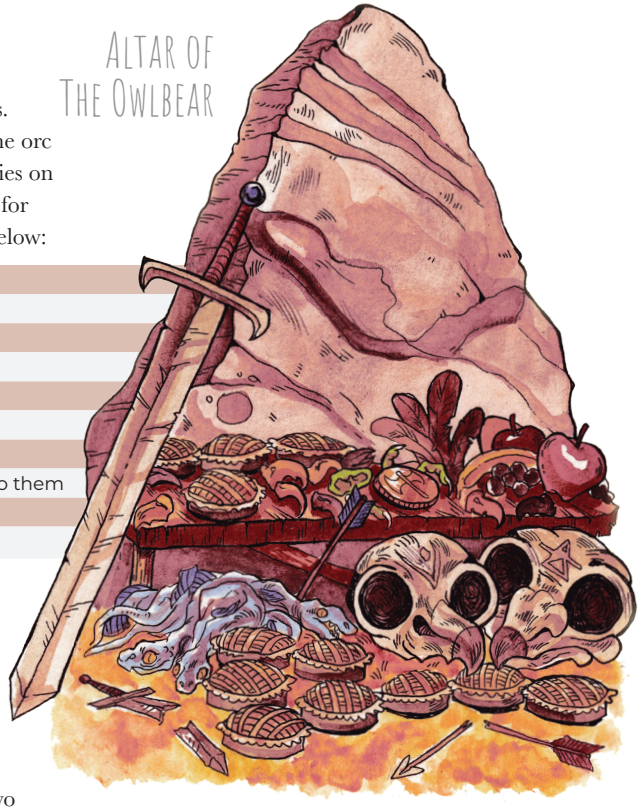
Before we march into battle we beg Verreaux's favor. Our benediction is this: those who face Verreaux will bear witness to his power, they will see the truth of our lord's absolute divinity, and they will understand the blessings he can offer his faithful followers.

Homily of Grandak,
High Priest of Verreaux

Paying Tribute to Verreaux

Offerings to Verreaux come in many forms. Severed limbs are a common offering, as the orc horde take these trophies from felled enemies on the battlefield and bring them to Verreaux for blessing. Ideas for offerings can be found below:

1	A bushel of fresh fruit and vegetables
2	An icon of an axe made of silver
3	Ears, fingers, and toes
4	Golden feathers
5	The beaks of ten birds
6	Gutted eels
7	Twelve broken weapons
8	Large owl skulls with runes carved into them
9	A dozen freshly baked tarts
10	A whole and worthy weapon



Lair Actions

When fighting with his horde, Verreaux can invoke his authority to take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Verreaux can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects. He can't use the same lair action two rounds in a row:

- Verreaux calls in 2d10 **orcs** as support in a fight. They enter combat on his initiative, but they wait for his call before attacking, even if it looks like Verreaux might lose. Verreaux can use this lair action twice per day.
- Drawing on the exaltation of his worshipers, Verreaux bestows a curse on all enemies within 60 feet of him. All targets within range must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be at disadvantage on all attacks until the end of Verreaux's next turn.
- Verreaux restores the 1st-level spells of an allied cleric within 120 feet of him. The cleric must use a reaction for this effect to occur, which is spent praying to Verreaux. This can only be used to benefit one cleric once per day.

Regional Effects

When the horde conquers a territory, they cause minor ecological havoc in the region:

- The horde targets crops and herds within a 10-mile radius, making food and supplies scarce for everyone else. Inns have only basic meals, and ale supplies in taverns are dried up. Smaller settlements may even suffer starvation.
- Orc raiding parties make it difficult to move through or around any territory they occupy, causing travelers to take five times longer to pass through any region under Verreaux's control.
- Verreaux's unnatural rise to godhood and profane aura has a negative effect on divine spell casters within 5 miles of his location. Clerics, Paladins, and any other creatures that receive spells from a divine source that cast a spell of 2nd-level or lower must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the spell is not cast, and they lose the spell slot with no effect. This does not impact worshippers of Verreaux.

Verreaux's Chosen

Medium humanoid (orc), neutral

Armor Class	12 (hide armor)
Hit Points	16 (3d8 + 3)
Speed	30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Skills Intimidation +4, Religion +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Orc

Challenge ½ (100 XP)

Aggressive. As a bonus action, the chosen can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature that it can see.

Spellcasting. The chosen is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). The chosen has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (3 slots): *bane, command, cure wounds, inflict wounds*

2nd level (2 slots): *aid, hold person*

Actions

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d12 + 2) slashing damage.

VERREAUX

EXALTED OWLBEAR

Huge monstrosity, lawful evil

Armor Class 19 *(+1 plate armor)*
Hit Points 171 (18d10 + 72)
Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Con +8, Wis +5

Skills Intimidation +5, Perception +5, Religion +5

Damage Resistances bludgeoning

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Giant Owl, Orc, Sylvan

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Special Equipment. Verreaux wears *+1 plate armor* and is attuned to *Verreaux's gospel**, accounted for in his statistics.

Keen Sight and Smell. Verreaux has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight or smell.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Verreaux fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multiattack. Verreaux makes two attacks: one with his his beak and one with *Verreaux's gospel**.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 12 (1d10 + 6) piercing damage.

Verreaux's Gospel. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 26 (3d12 + 7) slashing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) slashing damage.

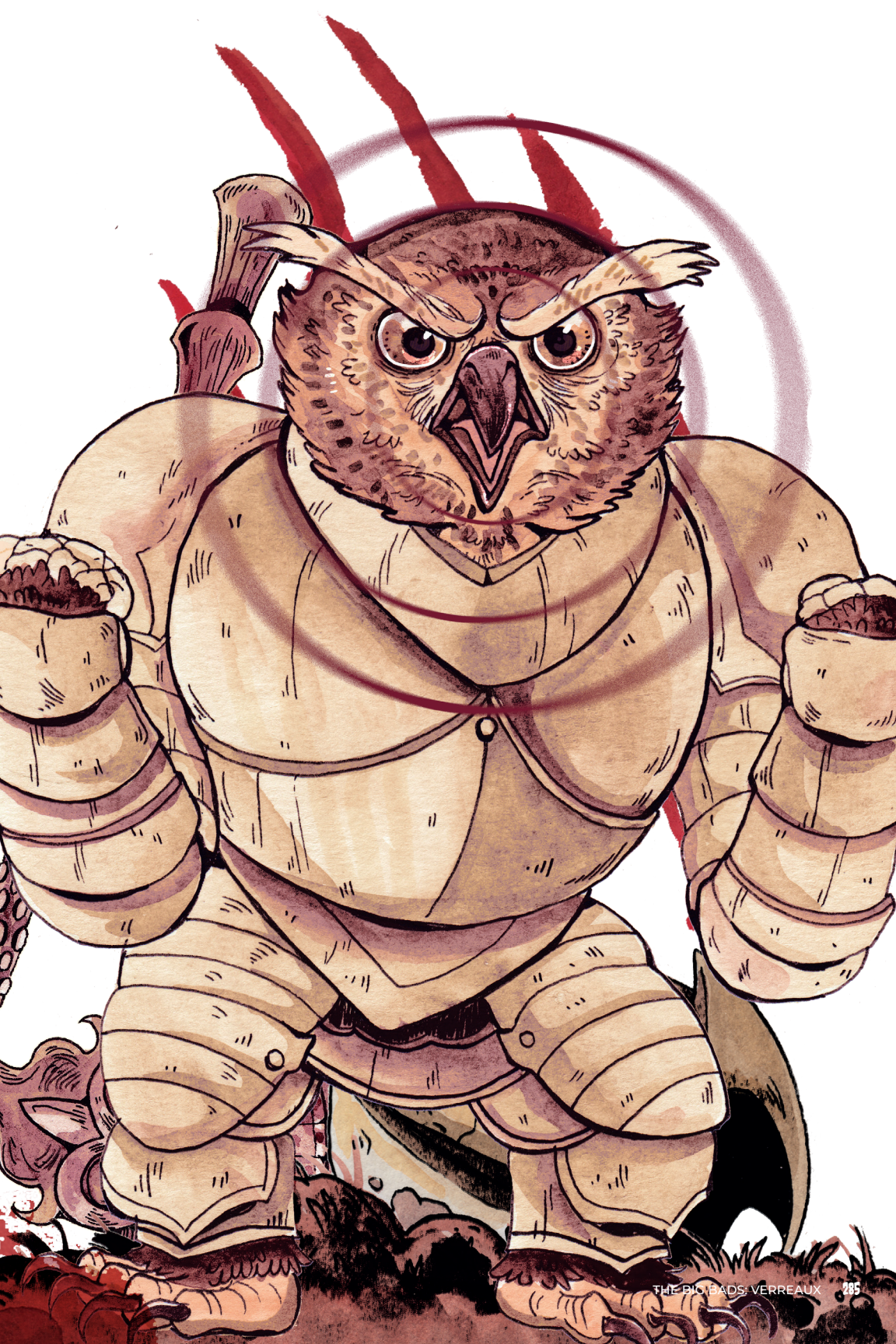
Legendary Actions

Verreaux can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Verreaux regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Detect. Verreaux makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Rend. Verreaux makes a claw attack and a beak attack.

Squawk. By screeching, Verreaux drives fear into the hearts of others. All creatures of Verraux's choice within 120 feet that can hear him must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of him until the end of his next turn.



WRANREBUR

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 024	ALIAS: Wielder of War
SIZE: Large	TYPE: Fiend
DANGER LEVEL: 12	DEMEANOR: Patiently Merciless

WARNING:

FEEDS ON CONFLICT

NOTES:

A reminder to all agents that when dealing with beings that feed on emotions, a cool head and calm attitude are always advised. Anger management and team building courses are available upon request.

-Interoffice Memo, Humanoid Resources

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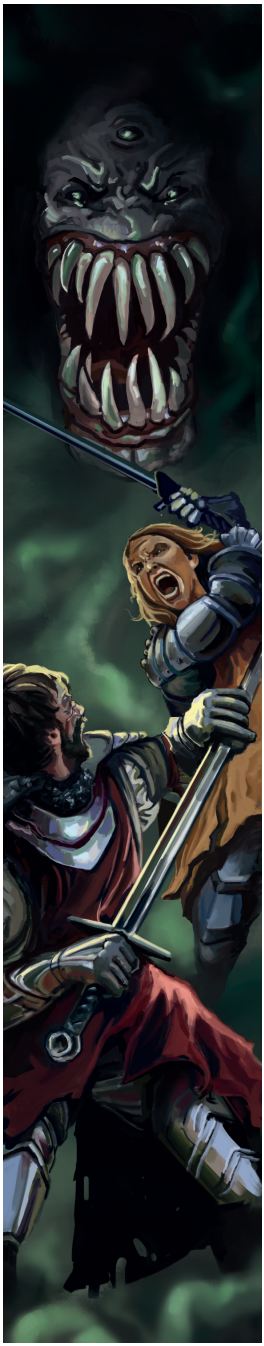
Illustrations: Nataly Zhuk



AWAKEN THE WAR!

"I will see you regret this," the jilted lover whispers, wiping the tears of anger and shame from his eyes. He is left alone in the glade where once the passion of romance held sway. Now, it is the passion of rage that fills the space, choking his very breath.

A hand extends towards him. Bitterly, he slaps it away.

"My sincerest apologies, good lad. I believed you required aid."

Looking up, the face of an elderly gentleman greets him. Though no smile mars his emotionless face, there is a gleam to his eyes that betrays anticipation. The jilted lover stands on his own and spits at the dirt, narrowly missing the gentleman's black boots.

If he were a bit more observant, he might notice certain oddities about this gentleman: the bright black shine of scale mail peeking out beneath the somber doublet, the hollow sound of bones clinking against one another as his bracelet jingles at his wrist. He might notice that the old man's black boots are oddly pristine and that, even more oddly, they don't quite touch the ground.

"What I require, you cannot offer me, old man." He stands brusquely.

"Oh? Well, then I am at a loss, for I am in need. Of directions, that is. If you could kindly direct me to the nearby town, I would gladly find a way to repay your generosity."

"If you have coin, I will let you follow me back into town, but do not tarry, old man. I have no patience for this today." He extends his hand, awaiting payment. His eyes fixate on the ring the gentleman wears, set with crimson jewels, so distracted by it that he doesn't notice the eerie length of the gentleman's fingers nor the sharpness of his nails.

The elderly gentleman smiles a smile that is too wide for his face. "I am Wranrebur, and I promise to repay your kindness."

Wranrebur, Wielder of War

A Distinguished Demon. During his earliest days manifested on the Material Plane, the demon **Wranrebur** simply sated himself by observing conflict. He feasted unthinkingly on the bloodshed the mortals inflicted on each other. As a being of chaos, Wranrebur was impulsive in his pursuit, unable to control his hunger, violence, or form. Over his centuries of wandering, Wranrebur has been present at many of the world's great conflicts, a grim specter on the battlefield, soaking up the destruction. At first he merely enjoyed being

a spectator of the humanoid capacity for carnage, but these wars were not frequent enough to satisfy him. It was only after witnessing dozens of minor wars and skirmishes that he began to refine his palate. Wranrebur began to meddle in the affairs of mortals, stoking the flames of resentment and fear to produce more and bloodier clashes. He has learned to be patient, inciting as many as possible to anger and violence, before watching the tensions erupt into his cultivated buffet.

A Famished Frenzy. Minute bursts of conflict—nightly tavern brawls or a child's violent tantrum —serve only to sharpen Wranrebur's appetite as he plots a war that will consume the world. Despite his outward appearance and his patience, Wranrebur retains his chaotic demonic impulses. The longer Wranrebur goes between large feasts of violence, the more difficult it becomes for him to play the role of the refined fiend. If enough time passes, he risks revealing himself for a quick taste of delicious carnage. Wranrebur's drive toward conflict is more than simple hunger; it is a craving that has never been fully satisfied. The small conflicts he triggers with his mere presence do assuage his hunger, empowering him slightly. The bloodier the conflict, the greater his power becomes. In the wake of a battle, Wranrebur collects corpses of those slain, transforming them into tormented undead beings called the **pitied**. These horrors act as his personal army which he keeps barracked inside the demiplane inside his magical ring.

Willing Warmonger. Wranrebur has slipped beneath the notice of the world for a long time. However, the petty skirmishes, turf wars, and small uprisings he has cultivated are becoming bland. Wranrebur has set his sights on a greater banquet of bloodshed, seeking to tip the world into all-out war. He has been traveling more than ever, ramping up tensions between different groups. His schemes include interfering with food supplies, hoping to create famines as a precursor to unrest. Ships that Wranrebur sails on rarely make it to port, succumbing to disastrous mutinies. Wranrebur has wormed his way into the confidences of many powerful people at every level of society. Despite his grand plans, he still makes time to gorge himself on smaller conflicts to feed his hunger.

Roleplaying Wranrebur

Cities and towns riddled with underlying resentment attract Wranrebur. Understanding how small conflicts can snowball into larger ones given the proper push, Wranrebur sows unhappiness and rumors at all levels of society. Whether pushing unhappy laborers towards revolt against the rich or driving leaders to blame outsiders to cover up internal unrest, Wranrebur's goal is to escalate conflict while keeping himself hidden.

Wranrebur typically chooses a starting point where there is already conflict brewing. He arrives in a city using his elderly human gentleman form and walks around the outskirts after dusk, flaunting his skull studded ring set with temptingly gaudy jewels or pretending to be a lost traveler to better understand potential conflict and corruption. In this form, Wranrebur puts on a facade of frailty. He will even allow himself to be robbed, though he always exacts revenge on those who steal from him. Retreating into the demiplane inside his ring, he can observe a town's underworld as the ring is passed from thief to fence to buyer. Through many years of living among humanoids, Wranrebur has observed patterns in behavior and how to react appropriately, but none of this comes naturally to him.

Wranrebur dons a mask of uncaring elegance. He speaks eloquently, preferring to use obscure words to portray sophistication. He strives to suppress his feral, fiendish nature, but his mask can be made to slip. He finds it hard to ignore nearby violence and death always attracts his attention, often luring him back into his fiendish form so that he can revel in it at the expense of his current scheme. In his eagerness to get to the kill, his plots can burn out too quickly in small incidents rather than nationwide carnage.

Wranrebur's Tactics

Having studied and lived among humanoids for centuries, Wranrebur understands that war rarely has a single cause. He works to amplify existing conflicts, sowing discord and paranoia wherever he goes. He enjoys turning friends, coworkers, and lovers against one another. This unrest spirals outward until travelers, merchants, and dignitaries find themselves trapped in a whirlwind of retribution. Preferring to use the liminal hours of dusk and dawn, Wranrebur stalks the town invisibly, spreading his whispers of war until it seems inevitable.

In his human form, he suggests causes of violence and rage to those most susceptible to commit the grandest atrocities. This is also when he runs the greatest risk of being caught, as those whose minds he cannot influence may begin to suspect the workings of an outside influence or, even worse, begin to see him as he truly is.

Though most overlook Wranrebur in his guise as an elderly human, his ghastly true form always hovers on the edges of their perception. If he lingers too long, one might witness his true form out of the corner of their eye, a smoky shape wavering in the air. If discovered, Wranrebur seeks to destroy the witness immediately so he may continue his machinations freely. However, if his target escapes the city, he will not follow. He hopes that the witness will return with more victims for him to destroy.

In battle, Wranrebur first attempts to manipulate his opponents into fighting one another, picking up any intraparty tension. Once that no longer seems effective, he switches to his true form to begin melee combat if he believes he can eliminate all witnesses. Once he begins fighting, he finds it difficult to stop as the frenzy overtakes him. He orders his army of **pitied** into battle recklessly, relying on the damage done to them to heal him. Wranrebur focuses his attention on one creature at a time, hoping to kill them and turn them into another pitied to fight alongside him against their former allies.

Wranrebur's Traits

Ideal. "Let the world tear itself apart for my delight."

Bond. "Never again will I return to the Lower Planes or the base attitudes of my youth."

Flaw. "I find it hard to maintain my disguise when faced with delicious death and destruction."

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Wranrebur in your campaign.

A Partisan Plea. A letter arrives for a party member from an old acquaintance back home. The letter is full of worry, mentioning how it seems everyone is walking on eggshells, just waiting for a riot to erupt between two criminal gangs. The letter writer has picked a side, hoping to keep their family safe. They are asking for assistance in the coming conflict. Wranrebur has been sowing dissent in the town, pitting two traditionally antagonistic gangs against each other.

Bizarre Banditry. Traveling between towns, the party is attacked by an unusual group of bandits dressed in common clothing. The bandits are stay-at-home parents and grandparents armed with mundane, makeshift weapons such as ladles, wooden spoons, and toy swords. These "bandits" have been whipped into a frenzy of xenophobia by Wranrebur.

Blinded Brinkmanship. Wranrebur has infiltrated the ruling council of a principality and has been pushing it toward war with a neighboring nation. At the same time, he has ensured his magic ring sits on the rival queen's finger and has been stoking her paranoia. Wranrebur has the leadership of both nations convinced that a war is justified. Only the treasurer of the principality has doubts. She believes that someone is unnecessarily escalating tensions. She asks the party to investigate the situation and to re-establish diplomatic relations if they can.

A Home to Harm

Wranrebur carries his lair with him wherever he goes. His *ring of deathly delights** contains a demiplane, untethered from reality. Wranrebur retreats inside whenever he feels the need to stretch out in his true form or if he wants to spy on the world from the ring's perspective. The world inside the ring smells of rust and blood. The air is hazy with heat, reflecting Wranrebur's abyssal origin. The walls are made from a mixture of translucent red crystal and membranous flesh. Frozen within the crystal sections are scenes of conflicts Wranrebur has enjoyed in the past.

Animus Antechamber. The dark portal where creatures can enter and exit the demiplane opens onto a long, empty hallway dimly illuminated by a dull red light. Beyond this hallway lies a door to the Animus Antechamber. Inside, the ground is perpetually wet with blood that squelches underfoot. Creatures must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity (Stealth) check or become restrained as arms grasp them from the bloody floor. Additionally, 2d4 **pitied** push through the membranous walls and attack.

War's Throne Room. The seat of Wranrebur's power features a central, macabre throne of shifting sinew and creaking bone. In front of the throne is a large scrying pool filled with blood that shows the world outside. The throne room is littered with squirming body parts and various blood-splattered weapons of war. Wranrebur is attended by the **pitied**, twisted victims of violence that he has transformed into undead horrors.

Lair Actions

Fueled by terror and suffering, Wranrebur taps into the energy of his home and the inherent violence given off by any who might challenge him there. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Wranrebur can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects. He can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- Images of betrayal dance on the crystal walls, visible to only one creature, enticing them to attack their closest ally. They must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or immediately use their reaction to make one melee or ranged attack against an ally within range.
- Wranrebur exhales, filling the entire demiplane with a thick, white, toxic fog that heavily obscures the area until initiative count 20 of the following round. Creatures who start their turn in the fog take 5 (2d4) necrotic damage as the mist sears their flesh.
- Tearing off a piece of bone from his throne, Wranrebur pushes it into the ground causing skeletal arms to stretch up through the floor and grasp at his enemies, mimicking the effects of the *black tentacles* spell (spell save DC 15). Wranrebur must maintain concentration on this effect as if he were casting a spell.

Regional Effects

As a slice of the abyss to call his own, the area surrounding Wranrebur's lair creates one or more of the following effects:

- Creatures within one mile of Wranrebur's lair are quick to anger at the slightest provocation.
- Within 1,000 feet, Charisma (Persuasion) checks to encourage peace are made with disadvantage.
- Within ten miles, wounds fester and are slow to heal. Medicine checks to heal injuries or stabilize dying creatures are made with disadvantage.

If Wranrebur is defeated, the demiplane collapses in on itself, reducing to a 5-foot by 5-foot room, expelling any creatures currently inside. The regional effects of Wranrebur's lair fade immediately.

Pitied

Medium undead, chaotic neutral

Armor Class	14 (natural armor)
Hit Points	39 (6d8 + 12)
Speed	20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	8 (−1)	6 (− 2)

Saving Throws Str +4, Con +4

Damage Immunities necrotic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, frightened

Senses blindsight 15 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 9

Languages understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Punished Existence. Pitied cannot regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Actions

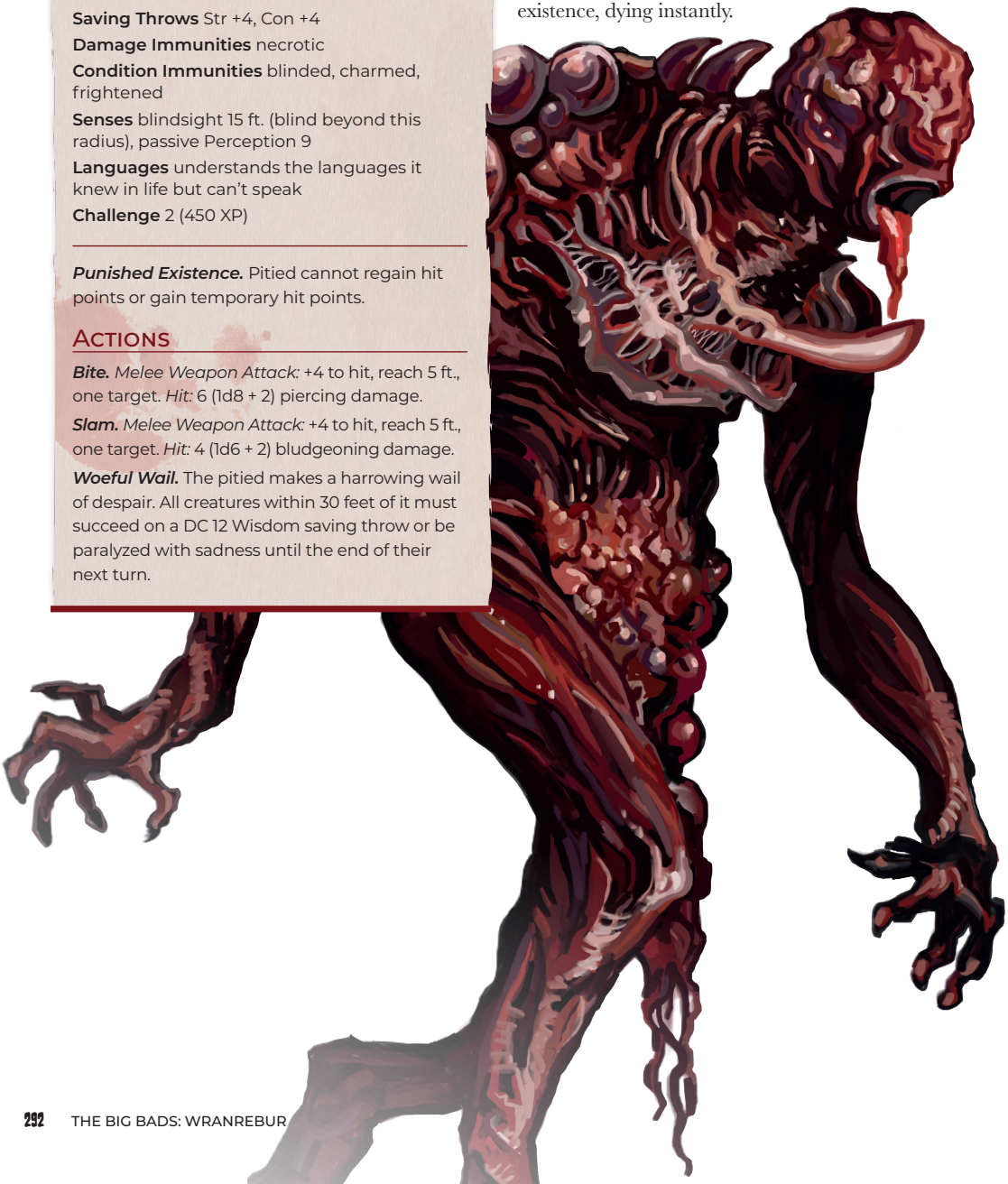
Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Woeful Wail. The pitied makes a harrowing wail of despair. All creatures within 30 feet of it must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or be paralyzed with sadness until the end of their next turn.

The Pitied

Wranrebur transforms victims into undead called the **pitied**—horrifying abominations turned inside out. Still-beating hearts and pulsing lungs can be seen attached to the wet meat and muscle of their desecrated bodies. Their exposed bones serve as armor. These tormented souls know only suffering and are forced by his cruel magic to serve as his personal army. If Wranrebur should die, the pitied are freed from their hellish existence, dying instantly.



Ring of Deathly Delights

Ring, very rare
(requires attunement)

This ring contains a demiplane that reflects the nature of the creature attuned to it. The more powerful the creature attuned to the ring, the larger the demiplane becomes. While inside the demiplane, you cannot be targeted by spells or attacks from outside the ring unless they are specified to work across planes. You cannot affect anything outside the demiplane while you are inside it. A scrying pool inside the demiplane allows you to see and hear what is happening outside the ring in a radius of 30 feet.

While within 30 feet of the ring, you can enter the demiplane as an action along with up to eight willing creatures. You can also attempt to force unwilling creatures within 10 feet of you to enter the ring at the same time as you. Unwilling creatures must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw and are forced to enter the demiplane on a failure. Creatures inside the demiplane can use their action to exit the ring if they move to the edge of the demiplane marked by a doorway of red crystal. Creatures may enter the demiplane using *plane shift* or similar magic.

Bangle of Bone Bargains

Wondrous item, very rare

While wearing this bracelet, when you make a death saving throw, you may choose to critically succeed, regaining 1 hit point and an additional 20 temporary hit points. This feature can only be used once.

Curse. The bangle becomes cursed only after it has been used, and its curse cannot be detected beforehand. Once used, the bracelet shatters into bone shards. These shards embed themselves into your flesh and work their way toward your heart. Each day at dawn, roll a d20. You must accept the result, and it cannot be affected by any other ability. On a result of 1, you receive a portent that your death will occur within 24 hours unless you find someone to take your place. Unless you kill a good or neutral aligned humanoid creature within 24 hours, the bone shards pierce your heart at the next dawn, killing you instantly. If you kill a good or neutral aligned creature, you gain 20 temporary hit points, and the shards do not pierce your heart. The curse continues until you die or the bone shards are removed. The bone shards cannot be removed by any magic except a *wish* spell or a Cleric's successful Divine Intervention.

WRANREBUR

WIELDER OF WAR

Large fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 195 (23d10 + 69)
Speed 40 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +7

Skills Deception +7, Insight +7, Perception +7, Persuasion +7, Stealth +9

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison, psychic

Damage Vulnerabilities radiant

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Abyssal, Common, Thieves' Cant, Undercommon

Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Special Equipment. Wranrebur wears a *ring of deathly delights** and a *bangle of bone bargains**.

Magic Resistance. Wranrebur has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Shapeshifting. Wranrebur can shift between his humanoid disguise and his true form as a bonus action. While in his humanoid form, his size is Medium, he cannot use his Bite or Claw attacks, and he does not have immunity from the grappled condition. Otherwise, his statistics remain the same. Wranrebur reverts to his true demonic form if he dies.

Violent Feast. When a creature other than Wranrebur damages another creature other than himself within 15 feet of Wranrebur, Wranrebur gains 7 (2d6) hit points.

Innate Spellcasting. Wranrebur's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring only verbal components:

At will: *confusion, invisibility* (self), *suggestion, vicious mockery*

1/day each**:** *hellish rebuke, inflict wounds*

Actions

Multiattack. Wranrebur makes two attacks while in his humanoid form or three attacks while in his fiend form, one with his bite and two with his claws.

Bite (Fiend Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d6 + 3) piercing damage, plus 7 (3d4) necrotic damage. Wranrebur regains hit points equal to the necrotic damage dealt.

Claw (Fiend Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d12 + 3) slashing damage.

Dagger (Humanoid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) piercing damage, plus 10 (4d4) poison damage.

Hand Crossbow (Humanoid Form Only). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage, plus 10 (4d4) poison damage.

Pity Them (2/Day). Wranrebur touches one deceased humanoid that has died within the last 24 hours. Its body turns in on itself, and it becomes a **pitied** under Wranrebur's control.

Legendary Actions

Wranrebur can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Wranrebur regains all spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Flayed Affliction. Wranrebur touches a creature within 5 feet of him and inverts one of its limbs to expose the muscle and bone. The creature's movement speed is halved until the end of its next turn.

Commander's Call (Costs 2 Actions). Wranrebur lets out a battle cry. Each **pitied** within 100 feet of him makes a melee attack against a creature within range. Every other creature that can hear Wranrebur must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a creature must use its reaction to make a melee attack against a creature other than Wranrebur.

Terrible Truth (Costs 2 Actions). Without provoking opportunity attacks, Wranrebur moves up to his speed to within 5 feet of a creature and whispers a secret, terrible truth to it. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become paralyzed until the end of its next turn.

ZARA HARLOWE

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: CLASSIFIED	ALIAS: Nix
SIZE: Medium	TYPE: Humanoid
DANGER LEVEL: 5	DEMEANOR: Distinctly Duplicitous

WARNING:

TWO FACES, BOTH TERRIBLE

NOTES:

This "Guildmaster & Chief" is giving Chiefs everywhere a bad name. I'd never live a double life and keep secrets from my trusted agents. Never!

-Chief Runcible Scowler

Concept: Michael Holik
Writing & Game Design: Michael Holik
Original Cover: Joel Holtzman
Illustrations: Dimitrios Pantazis

THE GAME WAS RIGGED FROM THE START!

Zara Harlowe, Guildmaster and Chief

For all intents and purposes, Chief **Zara Harlowe** of the Guard has overseen the most successful campaign of law and order in recent history. She has dismantled dozens of organized crime rings, ended mafiosos and intimidation rackets, busted high-profile heists in the act, and sent hundreds of career criminals to the gaol for life. She is respected by nobles and lionized by commoners.

Yet no one would suspect the Chief's darkest secret, nor could they guess the lengths to which she has gone to maintain law and order. For better or for worse, the grim story of Chief Harlowe is impossible to untangle from that of Guildmaster Nix.

The Guildmaster. The Thieves' Guild Guildmaster known as Nix is as pervasive as she is invisible. Over the last decade, her Thieves' Guild has flourished, rising to prominence in the criminal underworld, while her rivals, all capable and ruthless masterminds in their own right, have been systematically dismantled and arrested by the Guard, under the command of Chief Harlowe. The rare fool that gets too close to Nix loses their eyes and tongue if they're lucky enough to live.

It's all too convenient that the Guard hasn't so much as seen the enigmatic crime boss, just as it's too convenient that, while every other crime organization has been frayed or broken, the Guild only expands.

As Above, So Below. Only a handful of people know the truth: Chief Harlowe and Guildmaster Nix are one and the same. By day, Zara Harlowe plays the part of Chief and deploys her unaware guards on carefully considered missions. They arrest the Guild's enemies and disloyal Guild members but unwittingly clear the stage for a monopoly of crime. Meanwhile, her written orders contain secret instructions for double agents within the Guard, detailing which jobs to prioritize and which to avoid.

Zara's coded messages are signed with her initials and a dramatic cross: "ZHX." Rotated on its side, the signature reads "NIX" in the rotated characters on the page.

Bureaucracy does the rest of the heavy lifting. The Guard is a ticking clockwork engine of ranks and duties which make it opaque to all, save for the Chief herself, while the Thieves' Guild is a web of enforcers and lesser crime bosses; Guild members follow her every instruction without question, or they swiftly wind up dead. If an investigator learns too much, they end up mired in red tape or are simply cut down by members of the Guild.

In the rare circumstance Nix herself must make an appearance on Guild business, she dons a crimson *hat of disguise* and brings along her enforcers, **Holly** and **Hock**, who don heavy cloaks and masks to hide their identities. She ensures that her meetings with the Thieves' Guild happen far from the Guard's eyes, and she plays the part of a brutal crime boss, doing whatever is necessary to prevent insurrection.

Holly and Hock. Harlowe never travels anywhere without her personal bodyguards, the Guard's captains, Holly and Hock. Brusque and rough-hewn, the two seemingly make ill company for the civilized Chief but are her only close confidants in the otherwise political, backstabbing sphere of management. Harlowe keeps them loyal through generous payment and a promise of mutually assured destruction: all three have secrets that can never be made public.

Holly, a heavy-set blue dragonborn guard of towering stature, is secretly a lycanthrope. Under the full moon, she abandons her usual quiet stoicism and transforms into a bloodthirsty wereboar, usually leaving several bodies in her wake before dawn arises. Harlowe values the advantage of having a shapechanging monster on her side over the cost of cleaning up her messes each month.

Hock, though happy to wear the uniform of a guard while in Harlowe's employ, is actually a notorious necromancer with a list of crimes too lengthy and gruesome to list. They would be the spitting image of a dead-eyed, sadistic necromancer were it not for their convenient position as a town guard and the legal protection provided by Harlowe. Whenever Harlowe needs evidence of misdeeds to vanish, Hock facilitates it without a second thought. Often, this involves simply animating a number of corpses, having them clean up their own blood and viscera, as well as any other evidence of crime, and then commanding them to dress in something inconspicuous, walk across town, and jump into a river or vat of acid. Investigators are always baffled by these disappearances, much to Hock's delight.

HARLOWE'S LIST

Zara Harlowe keeps a list of enemies she intends to financially ruin or kill. At the top of the list is an enemy to both the Thieves' Guild and Guard: the master thief, **Akkadia**, the Mirror Mage. Her theatrical, brazen heists have shaken the Thieves' Guild's orderly monopoly and driven investigators in the Guard to new lengths, threatening to expose Harlowe's secret. Harlowe has every agent under her command seeking out the illusionist, whom she swears will meet a grave end. The ooze mob boss **Blrrk** also appears on Harlow's list. Harlow resents the cube's attempts to seep into her territory.

Roleplaying Zara Harlowe

Zara Harlowe possesses a complex dual personality: Chief of the Guard and Thieves' Guild Guildmaster, champion of law and order and criminal mastermind. In the rare moments she is not absorbed in her schemes, she is in deep conflict with herself. This could be a potential weakness that adventurers can exploit.

When Harlowe is positive that she is dealing with a pawn that could never harm her grand design, she slips comfortably into her role as a manipulator. She speaks with authority in any situation and lies as easily as she breathes. Even when sending someone into a deathtrap, she can and does calmly assure them of their safety. Whenever possible, she casts aspersions and plays people off one another, unloading the real work of conspiracy and manipulation onto the inevitable conflicts between her foes, which are sure to eliminate one or both of her problems over time.

Captain Harlowe should never appear suspicious to investigating adventurers until they have a great deal of evidence. Her letters are ingeniously encoded, and her persona as Nix is almost entirely separated from her normal life. Even her *hat of disguise* is stowed securely in a double-locked, lead-lined box in her office.

The organized charade of being both Thieves' Guild Guildmaster and Chief of the Guard has made Harlowe immeasurably wealthy and ensured that crime adheres to a rigid framework. Unlike her predecessor's regime, the Thieves' Guild no longer performs high-profile, brutal, or heinous crimes, preferring quiet schemes that preserve a corrupt kind of order. Were it not for the terrible deeds Harlowe has committed at every turn thus far, she might even think of herself as a righteous and justified protector. But she is no fool: her modestly positive ends can't even hope to justify her brutal means.

There are enemies around every turn for Harlowe; she can trust neither the law nor the underworld. She can rely only on her constant high-stakes balancing game between the Guard and the Guild. If anyone interrupts her grand machinations with even a slight inconvenience, she is liable to place them upon her list and mark them for death. Perhaps she can consider Holly and Hock as trustworthy friends, but only because they haven't failed her yet.

Harlowe's climb up the rungs of the Guard and her entanglement with the criminal underworld began early. As a low-ranking constable, she started accepting bribes from a band of thugs to look the other way on a protection racket. Soon, she was in command of her own division of guards and was manipulating patrol schedules to avoid bribe-insured heists. The corruption and lies grew until she reached equal standing with the small cadre of crime bosses who ran the underworld—it was a simple and easy decision to replace them in a few bloody nights of assassinations. She was already better at organizing both the guards and thieves under her purview, and her word ensured that no one on either side was hurt during violent crackdowns or botched heists. With Nix controlling the Thieves' Guild and Harlowe at the Guard, crime would be entirely under Zara's control, and the true chaos of the criminal underworld could, perhaps, be brought to order.

Harlowe still remembers how simply it began and understands the mortal flaws which lead people down similar dark paths. As such, she has pity for small-time crooks and those who find themselves on the wrong side of the system, and she occasionally goes out of her way to help a young thief that reminds her of her younger, more innocent self as they escape the system. These fleeting moments of humanity underline her moral center and help her justify her actions.

Zara Harlowe's Traits

In both her roles, Zara Harlowe is guided by the following personality traits:

Ideal. "I have banded law and chaos under the same invisible banner, and I will guide this system to a better tomorrow."

Bond. "There will be no other crime beyond that which I permit."

Flaw. "I am trapped in my web of lies, but it is a web of my own creation, so I relish in its complexity."

Zara Harlowe's Tactics

Chief Zara Harlowe does everything in her power to avoid combat while on duty unless she is silencing someone who suspects her secret. She is also never foolish enough to fight a battle she can't win; she flees if a battle begins to tip out of her favor.

If drawn into a fight, she sends in waves of allies—either guards or Thieves' Guild members. Only when her allies are depleted does she enter the fray alongside Holly and Hock. Holly transforms into her hybrid form and brandishes a maul if there are no guards to witness the transformation (or simply kills the guards that see her transform). Hock, meanwhile, produces four animated **skeletons** stored in a *bag of holding* to swarm their foes. Hock also casts *black tentacles* and *cloudkill* as early as possible to help turn the tide of battle.

Harlowe herself prefers hit-and-run combat, showering poisoned darts at her foes from out of reach and taking stabs with her *dagger of venom*, Litigation, when she thinks she can safely disengage or finish off a foe.

Adventure Hooks

You can use the following adventure hooks to bring Zara Harlowe and her conspiratorial web of allies into your campaign:

Closed Room Mystery. One of the party's old associates, who has been promoted to Inspector, reaches out for help in unraveling a series of confounding murders. The bodies show up several miles away from town, sometimes dismembered, but always more decomposed than expected. The most recent victim was discovered in a room locked from the inside. Their home across town was thoroughly cleaned on the night of the murder, and multiple witnesses place the victim walking across town in the dead of night toward the locked room. Can the adventurers unravel the mystery, and place the mysterious necromancer, Hock, at the center of it?

Heist 101! A master **spy** enlists the party for an elaborate heist: robbing Room 101 at the Guard Station, the evidence room. This job could score the party dozens of magic items and countless other valuables from among the contraband. The building is swarming with guards who could fill the room at a moment's notice, but if the party members enlist in the Guard beforehand, they might ensure success. Unbeknownst to them, Chief Harlowe has caught wind of the plan and is preparing to catch the thieves in the act!

Tinfoil Hats for Everyone. The party receives a rambling, incoherent letter from a former guard who claims to have "pieced it all together," uncovering "a conspiracy going all the way to the top!" If the party investigates, they find the contact dead in their home, evidently after a robbery gone awry. However, they also find a well-hidden folder full of notes and clues pointing to some ill-defined collaboration between the Chief of the Guard and an underworld figure known only as Nix. The nosy adventurers are soon framed for the murder and embroiled in skirmishes with both Guards and members of the Thieves' Guild!

The Guard Station and Thieves' Guild Headquarters

Zara Harlowe can be confronted in one of two lairs, the Guard Station or the Thieves' Guild Headquarters, each of which grants her unique lair actions.

The Guard Station

As Chief of the Guard, Harlowe possesses a modest but tiny office at the heart of the guard station. She is surrounded by loyal guards, is a short walk from an impeccably stocked armory, and can bring the station to high alert at a moment's notice.

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Harlowe can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects; Harlowe can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- Harlowe raises an alarm, drawing 1d6 guards to her aid, who approach through any open doors or passageways in the station. Harlowe can't take this action again until these guards have been defeated.
- Harlowe calls for assistance from her numerous constables and targets a creature she can see. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or become grappled by Harlowe's allies (escape DC 14).
- Harlowe signals to one of her snipers, who fires their crossbow at a creature she can see within 100 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage.

City Watch Badge

The Thieves' Guild Headquarters

Under the guise of Nix the Guildmaster, Zara Harlowe can bring all her criminal contacts to bear from the underground stronghold of the Thieves' Guild. The headquarters was built among abandoned sewers and catacombs, used by smugglers for generations. It is a maze of secret passageways and hidden traps, perfect for avoiding the law.

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Harlowe can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects; Harlowe can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- Harlowe raises an alarm, drawing 1d4 **thugs** to her aid, who approach through any open doors and passageways in the headquarters. Harlowe can't take this action again until these thugs have been defeated.
- Harlowe travels through a secret passageway, allowing her to move up to 30 feet through the walls or under the floor to emerge at an unoccupied location.
- A hidden trap delivers a fusillade of darts, which fill the air in a 15-foot cube at a point within 120 feet of Harlowe. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Holly

Medium humanoid (dragonborn, shapechanger), neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (scale mail) in humanoid form, 15 (natural armor) in boar and hybrid forms
Hit Points 51 (6d8 + 24)
Speed 30 ft. (40 ft. in boar form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	10 (+4)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Con +7, Wis +4

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +3

Damage Resistances lightning

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Draconic (can't speak in boar form)

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Charge (Boar or Hybrid Form Only). If Holly moves at least 15 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with her tusks on the same turn, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Relentless (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). If Holly takes 14 damage or less that would reduce her to 0 hit points, she is reduced to 1 hit point instead.

Shapechanger. Holly can use her action to polymorph into a boar-humanoid hybrid or into a boar, or back into her true form, which is humanoid. Her statistics, other than her AC, are the same in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. She reverts to her true form if she dies.

Actions

Multiattack (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). Holly makes two attacks, only one of which can be with her tusks.

Maul (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Tusks (Boar or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage. If the target is a humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with wereboar lycanthropy.

Breath Weapon (Recharges on a Short or Long Rest). Holly exhales a 5-foot-wide, 30-foot-long line of lightning. Each creature in the line must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Hock

Medium humanoid (half-elf), lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (16 with mage armor)
Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+3)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Arcana +7, Deception +3, History +7, Insight +4

Damage Resistances necrotic

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Elvish, Infernal

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Special Equipment. Hock carries a *bag of holding* filled with four animated **skeletons** under their control. Hock can turn the bag inside out as an action, unleashing all four skeletons at once, though the bag must be put right before it can be used again.

Fey Ancestry. Hock has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put them to sleep.

Magic Resistance. Hock has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Spellcasting. Hock is a 9th-level spellcaster. Their spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). Hock has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, mage hand, message, prestidigitation*
1st level (4 slots)**:** *burning hands, false life, mage armor^, shield*
2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness, misty step, web*
3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead, bestow curse, fireball*
4th level (3 slots): *dimension door, fire shield*
5th level (2 slots): *black tentacles, stoneskin^*
6th level (1 slot): *cloudkill*

^Hock casts these spells on themself before combat.

Actions

Corrosive Touch. *Melee Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) acid damage**.**

Zara Harlowe (Nix)

GUILDMASTER AND CHIEF

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)
Hit Points 88 (16d8 + 16)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Int +7

Skills Deception +10, Insight +9, Perception +6, Persuasion +7, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Common, thieves' cant.

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Special Equipment. Zara wears a *hat of disguise* and *ring of mind shielding*, and she wields a *dagger of venom* named Litigation.

Evasion. If Zara is subjected to an effect that allows her to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, she instead takes no damage if she succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if she fails.

Nimble Escape. Zara can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of her turns.

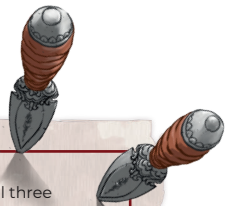
Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Zara deals an extra 17 (5d6) damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Zara that isn't incapacitated and Zara doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Multiattack. Zara makes three attacks.

Litigation. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage. As an action, Zara can coat Litigation in thick, black poison. If the dagger is coated in poison, the target must also succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 11 (2d10) poison damage and become poisoned for 1 minute. Once a creature fails this saving throw, the dagger can't be coated in poison again until the following dawn.

Dart. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage, plus 3 (1d6) poison damage.



Note

When Zara, Holly and Hock are encountered together, they are a CR 10 encounter. When all three are encountered in either of Zara's lairs, they are a CR 11 encounter.

oshi
oshitani

ZELEPHESTRINA

BIG BAD BUREAU
CASE FILE

CASE NUMBER: 014	ALIAS: The Sorcerous Succubus
SIZE: Medium	TYPE: Fiend
DANGER LEVEL: 10	DEMEANOR: Devilishly Smart

WARNING:

SHE PLAYS TO WIN

NOTES:

I can't believe I have to remind you all AGAIN, but attempting to engage in personal relationships with Big Bads is strictly against Bureau policy. Seriously folks, she's not that into you.

-Scorpio Sala, Head of Humanoid Resources

Concept: Jake Michels
Writing & Game Design: Jake Michels
Original Cover: Yoshi Yoshitani
Illustrations: Russell Werges

HER KISS CAN KILL!

Zelephestrina, The Sorcerous Succubus

Among the demonic and devilish cultures of the lower planes, succubi and incubi inhabit the lowest tiers of the fiendish hierarchy. Utilized as advisors, conspirators, and spies, these seductive specialists rarely rise beyond their meager standing among the hellions.

The succubus **Zelephestrina**, however, is an exception.

Elite Agent. Prized by Yusanasi, the Demon Lord of Treachery, as his most efficient assassin, this cunning succubus brought ruin to many mortal noble houses by seducing and turning family members against one another. With her charming magic and enchanting whispers, Zelephestrina destroyed royal marriages, instigated murderous sibling rivalries, and beguiled lifelong allies into violent betrayal.

Yusanasi rewarded her cruel machinations with a gift: the preserved heart of the renegade sorcerer giant Cadrisio Frostfist. "Consume it.., and let his magic consume you," the Demon Lord growled at his servant. Taking the massive heart in her hands, Zelephrestrina distended her jaw, her vibrant skin stretching to impossible lengths, and ate it in one bite. The innate magic that once flowed through the veins of the dead giant now coursed through her demon body, amplifying her powers of persuasion and guile. Eager to please Yusanasi again, Zelephestrina flew to the mortal planes and schemed to create even more treachery among their inhabitants. When subterfuge proved futile, she relied on her newly increased powers to vanquish her opponents. And it worked. Yet, Zelephestrina craved more.

Arcane Attraction. Over a millenia, her power grew. Soon she forgot her duties to Yusanasi. Instead, she searched the planes for other sorcerers, those born with innate magic. She seduced, interrogated, and eventually murdered the unlucky magicians. Their knowledge of other sorcerers and the arcane arts were her main course. Their hearts were her dessert. As the killings increased, a wizards' guild offered rewards for information about this mysterious sorcerer-hunter. But Zelephestrina's face changed with each encounter; the innate gift of shapechange allowed her to blend in with any culture, keeping her several steps ahead of pursuers. One moment she might appear as the upright matron of a traveling merchant guild, the next as an adolescent girl with a torn dress claiming to have been separated from her parents. Her favorite disguise, that of a scarred swordmaster from the Hundred Isles, drew many curious souls into her web.

Power and Pain. Zelephestrina found herself hungrier and hungrier for power, cutting a swath across the multiverse, devouring the hearts of any powerful sorcerers and spellcasters she could find. When she eventually returned to the lower planes and presented herself to Yusanasi, she demanded to be raised in the hierarchy according to the new power she had attained on her journey. The fiendlord bellowed with laughter at her arrogance, his bulbous neck rippling in mirth. She laughed along with him, then raised her hands toward the Demon Lord. His laughter soon turned to a roar of agony

as his skin boiled and burst. Fiery imps and insect-like quasits, who haunted the rafters of Yusanasi's Palace of Ichor, fled from the cacophony of their master's screams.

When news of Yusanasi's murder reached the other Demon Lords, they raised hordes to pursue Zelephestrina throughout the abyss. Hunted endlessly and driven into hiding, she was forced to abandon the lower planes and prowl the many other realms of the multiverse. She hid from demonic agents and hunted all manner of creatures with innate magical abilities. Zelephestrina believed if she attained enough power through consumption, she would one day earn respect from the Demon Lords.

Book of Names. But her quest eventually came to an abrupt halt. While scouring the Thunder Crescent Mountains, a hermit gnome wizard named Temius the Red (for his cherry-red nose) discovered a skin-bound tome buried in crumbled ruins. The book contained demonic legends recorded by the hand of some escaped soul from the Maze of Anguish. Included among the stories was a ledger of the true names of several ranks of Demon Lords and lesser lieutenants of the abyss.

In the solitary laboratory, on the top floor of his hidden tower, Temius set to work designing protective wards to ensure any demons he summoned would not escape. After nearly a year of carefully etching arcane sigils into the floor and walls of his lab, he performed a laborious and powerful conjuration ritual to summon a demon whose name he had discovered within the book. As the last words of the spell left his lips, he consulted the list of true names and uttered one: "Zelephestrina."

Imprisoned Fiend. Deep in the swamplands, Temius's tower sits among the overgrowth of black vines and twisted roots. Having long ago killed Temius by draining his life force with her deadly kiss, Zelephestrina remains trapped in his laboratory, bound by the deceased wizard's arcane runes. Any curious folk brave enough to enter the tower may suffer her charming magic and be interrogated for their knowledge of the tower and its wards. So far, she has been unsuccessful in finding a magic-user to dispel the wards. But many of the wandering souls who fell to her charms now wander the plane using lies to entice magical heroes to aid their master.

Abyssal Ambition. Above all, Zelephestrina wants to escape so she can continue pursuing her cravings for magical energies. Her first taste of sorcerous powers began an appetite that has proven insatiable. As a result, she is willing to negotiate with characters in return for her freedom, or for the life of any innately magical creatures. If released, she may play the long game by offering false rewards in return for information of the whereabouts of any sorcerers as well. Whatever her chosen tactic, her impatience for power eventually shines through; if made to wait too long, or if her negotiating partner appears too weak to be of use, she ends them mercilessly.

Roleplaying Zelephestrina

Zelephestrina grows impatient. Every day of imprisonment in the wizard's laboratory is another lost opportunity to gain power. Additionally, the threat of discovery by the hordes of the Demon Lords drives her to find a solution to her predicament. She sends charmed adventurers out into the world to trick others into journeying to the tower, where she hopes to find a magic-user powerful enough to dispel the wards.

If a more ambitious character understands Zelephestrina's true nature and attempts to bargain with her, she will promise to give the character anything they want in return for her freedom. Though she has no intention of actually keeping the promise, she attempts to convince the character to the best of her ability.

Zelephestrina's Tactics

Though she makes a formidable foe in combat, Zelephestrina prefers to use her charming magic and charisma against opponents. She may either entice characters to kill each other and take hostage any magic-user among the party, use those she has charmed to sway the group, or attempt to convince the adventurers to help her escape. Though she typically resorts to deception, she may also tell partial (or whole) truths in order to convince suspicious characters. Depending on her current disguise, she may confirm that she is imprisoned by a magical spell, some trap designed by the wizard who built the lab. In this role, she takes on a pitiful persona, begging the characters for help with a look of frightened confusion in her eyes. If possible, she employs persuasion, deception, and even charms to convince magic-users in the group to cast *dispel magic* on the wards of the laboratory.

If the party senses Zelephestrina's deception or threatens her with too much force, she resorts to violence. The high ceilings of the lab and its poor lighting allow her to fly away from most melee combatants. She does her best to use any enchanted minions or NPCs to take the party by surprise while she casts spells from a distance. When she spots a magic-user, Zelephestrina disrupts their magic, whispering a coy promise of revenge on the character.

If her hit points are reduced to 30 or fewer, she shifts to the Ethereal Plane. However, she must remain in the area of the laboratory on that plane, and due to the wards, she is forced to return to the Material Plane after 1 hour. In this way, her healing abilities are limited, and a resourceful party may be able to defeat her over time.

Zelephestrina's Traits

Ideal. "I favor a cunning solution to my problems; violence is a dessert best saved for last."

Bond. "I seek sorcerous knowledge to ascend beyond the limits of the demonic hierarchy."

Flaw. "I'm incapable of trusting anyone, and thus no one trusts me."

Charming Glance

The Wizard's Wards

The wards of Temius's ritual spell are meant to keep Zelephestrina within the laboratory for exactly 1,000 years. Any creature who attempts to decipher the runes etched into the lab floor and walls can determine their nature with a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check. A *dispel magic* spell, cast against the wards as if they were a 6th-level spell, ends their effect and frees Zelephestrina. If this spell is cast by a fiend or a creature with fiendish heritage (including tieflings), it automatically fails.

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Zelephestrina in your campaign.

Assist the Acolytes. A cadre of missionaries approach one of the party's magic-users, requesting arcane assistance. Their matron leader has been trapped inside a magical prison. She's alive but cannot pass through the magical wards, imprisoning her in the tower.

In truth, the matron is Zelephestrina in disguise, and the dispelling of the wards will free her from bondage. The missionaries are charmed (or deceived) victims of Zelephestrina's magic. They ventured into Temius's tower, and the demon used them to find magic-users powerful enough to dispel the wards.

Words of the Condemned. A condemned murderer at his public execution claims a beautiful woman took over his mind and made him commit his crimes. When the guards captured him and knocked him unconscious, her spell was broken, but no one believes him. If the party is able to question the man, he tells them he and his companions heard cries of distress from a tower deep in the nearby hills. However, upon entering, the cries stopped. He heard a soft whisper in his ear and suddenly, without thinking, he drove his sword into his friend's back. The whisper implored him to return to town and kidnap the high wizard's son and kill the boy's attendants. The man insists the whispers made him do it.

The Book of True Names. This skin-bound tome contains demonic lore and arcane formulae related to conjuration magic. A notable feature of the book is an index of true names for scores of fiends—a powerful tool for any conjurer. A dwarven talismonger named Faldeza hires the party to broker a deal between herself and the current owner, whose identity she has determined through careful divination magics. The holder of the book, the wizard Temius the Red, lives deep in the swamplands. Unfortunately (and unknown to Faldeza), Temius used the book to summon Zelephestrina, who promptly charmed and killed him. Now the book resides with her in the wizard's laboratory where she remains trapped.

The Tower Prison

When Zelephestrina was first trapped inside Temius's laboratory, the entire place was antagonistic to her. Even after killing the old wizard, Temius's defenses still saw her as an intruder. Animated books would fly off shelves and attack her, and magical shackles would limit her movement around the room.

Zelephestrina's powers of persuasion and strength of will, however, are formidable.She soon learned how to control the arcane energies powering these defenses, making them work for her instead, rather than against her.

Though she cannot wait for the day she can leave her prison, and would be loath to call it home, Zelephestrina has done what she can to make sure the old wizard's tower of strange arcane magics help further her nefarious plans.

Other Tower Floors

Temius's tower has several floors, and the journey up to the laboratory that serves as Zelephestrina's prison is filled with interesting and dangerous encounters. The following options are just a few of the rooms the party might come across:

Temius's Sleeping Chambers. Temius died in his own home by his prisoner's hand. The wards that once protected his personal belongings no longer active. In his personal chambers, Temius kept every wizard's most prized possessions: his spellbooks. A locked drawer in his writing desk can be opened with a DC 25 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand or Thieves' Tools) check. It contains four magic tomes containing the following spells: *counterspell*, *fire bolt*, *globe of invulnerability*, *glyph of warding*, imprisonment, *magic circle*, *prestidigitation*, and *shatter*.

The Menagerie. On occasion, Temius would require live subjects for his experiments and would often seek out strange and unusual creatures to add to his growing collection. The floor of the tower that contains this menagerie is now mostly abandoned; the magical fields used to contain the creatures powered down long ago. The only creatures that remain are a nest of phase spiders, who feed off what is left of the magical energy of this room. At any given time there will be 1d6 **phase spiders** lurking in The Menagerie.

Component Storage. One unexpected side effect of collecting so much potent magic material in one place is that they may react in strange ways when kept close together. Temius's sudden demise has left the plants, crystals, and insects kept in storage to grow and change in unusual ways. The floor of the storage space is covered in the twisted roots of several dozen mutated plants, causing this entire room to be difficult terrain. Spellcasters will be able to find almost any plant based material component they might require here, and most gems and crystal material components of 100 gp value or less. The creatures that lurk here are less keen on visitors, and every 10 minutes spent scrounging here has a cumulative 5 percent chance of stirring up 1d4 **swarms of rats** and 1d4 **swarms of insects** from amongst the vegetation.

Lair Actions

Though the laboratory is not her personal lair, Zelephestrina's imprisonment has driven her to fortify as much of the wizard's lab as possible. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties) Zelephestrina takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects. She can't use the same lair action two rounds in a row:

- Zelephestrina targets a creature within 30 feet of her to be bombarded by animated books. The target must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, it takes 10 (4d4) bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone. On a successful save, it takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone.
- Arcane shackles rise up from glyphs on the laboratory floor. Up to three creatures Zelephestrina can see must pass a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be restrained until the end of their next turn.
- A trick floorboard drops out from underneath a creature of Zelephestrina's choice within 30 feet of her. The target creature must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall through to the floor below the laboratory, landing prone on the floor.

Regional Effects

The swamp that surrounds Zelephestrina's tower prison has begun to swallow up the tall building, almost completely obscuring the ground floor entrance. The swamp, the inherent magical energies of years of Temius' arcane experiments, and now Zelephestrina's meddling have caused the area around the tower to have the following regional effects:

- In the time she's spent captive within the wards of the room, Zelephestrina's managed to weave a minor enchantment to help lure adventurers into the tower. Anyone within 500 feet of her tower hears the distressing cries of a young girl coming from within. These cries, if listened to for more than 10 minutes, impose a magical sympathy on a creature, who must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or suffer a curse which imposes disadvantage on any future saving throws against Zelephestrina's abilities for 24 hours. This effect can be removed by a *remove curse* spell.
- The swamp in a 1000 foot radius around the tower churns with mild arcane energy, making it difficult terrain.
- The walls of the tower are slick with slime and muck and cannot be scaled without proper equipment.

ZELEPHESTRINA

SORCEROUS SUCCUBUS

Medium fiend (shapechanger), neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (*studded leather* +2)
Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)
Speed 30 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Wis +6, Cha +9

Skills Deception +13, Insight +6, Perception +6, Persuasion +13, Stealth +8

Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities frightened, charmed

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal, telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Heightened Telepathic Bond. Zelephestrina ignores the range restriction on her telepathy when communicating with a creature she has charmed. The two can even be on different planes of existence.

Magic Resistance. Zelephestrina has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Shapechanger. Zelephestrina can use her action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid, or back into her true form. Without wings, she loses her flying speed. Other than her size and speed, her statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. She reverts to her true form if she dies.

Special Equipment. Zelephestrina wears an *amulet of free action* (functions as a *ring of free action*), *studded leather* +2 armor, and a *wand of binding*. The wand of binding has 0 charges left and cannot recharge while in the confines of Zelephestrina's tower.

Spellcasting. Zelephestrina is a 14th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will)*: chill touch, mage hand, prestidigitation, vicious mockery*

1st level (4 slots): *comprehend languages, detect magic, expeditious retreat, shield, silent image*

2nd level (3 slots): *mirror image, misty step, silence*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, fear, fireball*

4th level (3 slots): *dimension door, dominate beast, polymorph*

5th level (2 slots): *animate objects, wall of stone*

6th level (1 slot): *mass suggestion*

7th level (1 slot): *reverse gravity*

Actions

Claw (Fiend Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Draining Kiss. Zelephestrina kisses a willing creature or a creature charmed by her. The target must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 32 (5d10 + 5) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Inhibited Etherealness. Zelephestrina magically enters the Ethereal Plane from the Material Plane, or vice versa. However, the wards of the tower prevent her from leaving its grounds and also disrupt her powers to travel to the ethereal realm. The magical threads of the abjuration ritual span the planes, keeping her from leaving tower boundaries in any realm but allowing her to traverse to the ethereal. She may only remain in the Ethereal Plane for 1 hour before the energy of the wards forces her back to the Material Plane.

Sorcerous Charm (Recharge 5–6). One humanoid Zelephestrina can see within 30 feet of her must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be magically charmed by her for 1 month. The charmed target obeys her verbal and telepathic commands. If the target suffers any harm or receives a suicidal command, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success. If the target successfully saves against the effect, or if the effect on it ends, the target is immune to this charm for the next 24 hours. Zelephestrina can have a maximum of seven targets charmed at a time. If she charms another while controlling seven, the effect on one of the previous targets ends (her choice).

Reactions

Wink. Zelephestrina gives a charming glance and winks at one magic-user she can see within 120 feet of her. If the creature is maintaining concentration on a magical ability or spell, it must immediately succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or lose concentration and take 7 (3d4) psychic damage.

Federico Piatti

BUILDING BIG BAD CAMPAIGNS

Each Big Bad can be the final boss of a campaign built around it, but you can also use them together to create longer adventures. This chapter presents frameworks that combine multiple Big Bads into a campaign by creating narrative threads between them. Each framework demonstrates a different way to combine Big Bads into a campaign:

- **Akkadia's Gambit** uses Akkadia as a recurring adversary as the party races against her to collect the magic items and pieces of the Horned Giant from four other Big Bads—Tussentenner, Blrrk, Harathos, and The Maker.
- **The Crystals' Call** plays out in three distinct arcs—Tendon and Bone, Exaxxia, and the Prince-in-Ivory—with the end of each arc leading to the next in an unfolding mystery.
- **Ruin of the Rune** focuses on Magda and her possession by Rel'Um and adds Daniel as an obstacle the party must face along the way.
- **Worse Things Happen at Sea** pits three Big Bads against each other at once—Shen, Fulmini, and The Melcombe. The party can decide to ally with one, two, or none of them. This framework ends by shifting the setting to Saewyn's island, where new alliances can form or be broken.

Each campaign frame is broken down into the following sections:

- **Introduction.** This introduces the campaign as a whole, suggests a tone, and gives an overview of the campaign's major story beats.
- **Starting Level.** Each Big Bad arc has a recommended starting level range for a party of four player characters. Many of these campaigns do not rely on the party defeating a Big Bad in combat, so they can be played with characters of lower levels than suggested by a Big Bad's CR.
- **Scenario.** The scenario suggests a quest hook to draw your players into the adventure and outlines a Big Bad's motivations and schemes. New NPCs are also introduced here.
- **Adversaries.** Each arc includes a selection of monsters that can be encountered on the way to a showdown with a Big Bad. Depending on the scenario, these creatures could be in league with the Big Bad or serve as obstacles to reaching them. Monsters marked in **bold blue** text can be found in this book. Monsters marked in **bold purple** text can be found in the 5e core rules. Magic items and spells are marked with *italics*, and new magic items found in this book are also marked with an asterisk *.
- **Conclusions.** This section contains possible outcomes and ways to connect the arc to the next one.

Running a Big Bad Campaign

Story Scaffolding. These campaigns are a framework for your to build your adventure. Refer to each Big Bad's main entry in this book for additional details about their backstories, motivations, tactics, statistic, lairs, minions, roleplaying tips, and the additional context you need to flesh out the campaign.

Leveling Up. Milestone leveling is recommended for these campaigns. When the player characters defeat or pacify a Big Bad, that is usually a good point to have them level up.

Between Big Bads. To keep the tension high, you may want to move quickly from one Big Bad arc to another. Alternatively, you can vary the pace of your game by giving the party an opportunity for downtime in between arcs. For a longer campaign, you can have your players tackle another challenge either drawn from a different adventure or created yourself before tackling the next Big Bad arc.

I just got a lead on the next three relics that will get us closer to solving the riddle of the statue. For the magical sword, we'll have to contend with nothing but constructs around. I'm interested in seeing if our tricks hold up against them. This heist will either be really easy or really hard. Instead of a crown, I'm thinking we should aim for a gem that creates sentience lodged in the head of a goopy mob boss. Our secret will be hard to keep if the isolated ooze holding the gem touches one of us as "illusions" and we fail to grab it. The last will be our most difficult pull, but it's probably one of the most powerful magic items ever.

The god's ring has to be stolen from a king's finger. We will plan it during his birthday celebration, so we'll have lots of cover. But our performance must be seamless if we're going to pull this off. My contact has sent a description of the venue. We should look for access points and plan our exit, which might need to be exceptionally rapid.

I have some ideas for the ring! That job will need the most over-the-top production we've ever performed since we're stealing it off his finger. I would love to take the lead as Akkadia on this one.

The gem could be dangerous. We may have to pretend to join their organization to even get an audience with Blrrk. That'll take time, and time is the enemy of illusion.

Might I add one more relic to your impressive list, sister? I heard a tale of a wolf giant's bracelet that I think will be a good addition to our endeavor. I can study the item since it came into its magical abilities more recently than all of our other relics. I am confident Rosabel can devise a script to flatter the wolf giant about his stature. From what I hear, that's all we need to get close enough to procure the bracelet and make a hasty retreat.

The king's party would be perfect for you to take the lead, Rosabel. The bracelet sounds simple enough since he will be the easiest to approach in the woods, Maribel. I think Rosabel would have the best performance for that one as well. I'll be the main Akkadia for the gem. Maribel, you take the lead on the sword. I've got a feeling a mountain full of magical constructs is right up your alley.

I'm working on the script for the wolf giant performance right now! We'll meet at dawn tomorrow to go over Adabel's plan. I'll make the necessary changes, and then we can start rehearsals.

I wish you could see me rolling my eyes right now, Rosabel. Why do we always have to meet so early? I will read up on lycanthropy so there aren't any surprises. Can you imagine one of us becoming a wolf?

Be nice, Maribel!
Don't stay up late reading,
and you'll be fine.
Tomorrow at dawn it is!

Akkadia's Gambit

The Mirror Mage, **Akkadia**, is collecting pieces of the Horned Giant statue and the magic items needed to put it back together. The Domarov sisters, who each play the role of Akkadia, are targeting **Tussentenner** for his *bracelet* of *giant teeth**, **King Blrrk** for their gem of *whirling cosmic thought**; a king in service of the chained god **Harathos** for his *ring of the bound**, and **The Maker** for the sentient sword *Al-Babbage**. An NPC named Patrix Palaio [he/him] tasks the party with securing the magic items and statue pieces before Akkadia can collect them all. Throughout this campaign, Akkadia returns as a foe, weaving in and out of the other Big Bad's arcs. If Akkadia collects the pieces, the Domarov sisters will succeed in reconstructing the Horned Giant. If the party collects them, they find themselves betrayed by Patrix, who is actually a **cultist of Telyfios**, dedicated to restoring **the Horned Giant** himself so he can receive the fiend's favor.

Arc 1: Akkadia

Starting Level 6th to 8th

Scenario

Questionable Quest Giver. A secretive benefactor named Patrix Palaio contacts the party with a quest he claims will prevent an apocalypse. He tells the party that the renowned thief, Akkadia, is collecting the pieces of a cursed statue called the Horned Giant and plans to summon a great evil back into the world. Patrix will provide the party with whatever equipment and funds they need if they can collect the items before Akkadia. Patrix wants to be seen as a trustworthy and helpful ally until the party has gathered everything he needs to reconstruct the Horned Giant. However, he is careful to spend only a little bit of time with the party as the Curse of Telyfios turns people against him. Patrix pretends to be a meek scholar who is too busy with research to meet with the party frequently, and he often relies on his underlings, **cult fanatics**, to do business with the party instead.

Nab Them and Leg It. Akkadia's first heist is to collect the legs of the Horned Giant statue that are on display in an art museum. Patrix has learned that she plans to strike on the night of a grand gala. He claims that the museum is vulnerable and asks the party to bring the legs to him so he can keep them safe.

Adversaries

Akkadia will use all of her tricks to steal the Horned Giant's legs. Unless the party interferes with her plans or steals it first, she will get away with the leg at midnight on the night of the gala. In the museum, the party will also have to deal with the **guards** and the security provided by suits of **animated armor**, as well as the **nobles** and **commoners** attending the gala.

Conclusions

If the party is able to steal the legs, Patrix rewards them handsomely and asks them to place them in a secure vault in his fortified mansion.

If Akkadia succeeds in stealing the legs, Patrix is disappointed but reassures the party that they still have a chance to stop her if they can collect the other pieces first.

If one of the Domarov sisters is killed, the other two continue their plan to gather the pieces.

Jeff Miracola

Arc 2: Tussentenner

Starting Level 7th to 9th

SCENARIO

A Belt with Bite. Patrix lets the party know that Akkadia will be targeting the lycanthropic giant Tussentenner to steal his bracelet of *giant teeth**, as powerful magic items are needed to reconnect the pieces of the statue. He asks them to steal the bracelet before Akkaida can get her hands on it.

Whichwolf? Akkadia has infiltrated Tussentenner's tribe of lycanthropes so she can get close to the jarl and flatter him into giving up the bracelet. She uses illusion magic to disguise herself as one of his werewolf followers.

ADVERSARIES

To reach the jarl, the party will have to get past the **werewolves**, **wererats**, and **wereboars** that gather around him. **Tussentenner** won't give up his bracelet of *giant teeth** without a fight. If **Akkadia** learns that the party is coming, she tries to rile up Tussentenner to attack them by telling him that they are working for other giants.

CONCLUSIONS

If the party defeats Tussentenner, Akkadia attempts to steal the bracelet of *giant teeth** and escape. If Akkadia gets away with the bracelet, Patrix is disappointed but encourages the party to keep trying.

If the party secures the bracelet, Patrix asks them to place it in his vault and congratulates them on a job well done.

Arc 2: King Blrrk

Starting Level 11th-13th

SCENARIO

Oozing with Class. Two of the Horned Giant's arms are being auctioned at an underground event organized by the infamous ooze-king of crime, Blrrk, in their lair. Blrrk has arranged a classy affair with fine—yet, questionable—canapes and tight security. Many powerful magic items and bottles of wine are up for auction, and the event has drawn many powerful underworld figures to Blrrk's lair.

Blrrk's Crowning Glory. Akkadia intends to acquire both the arms and Blrrk's gem of w*hirling cosmic thought** in a daring double heist. By this point, Akkadia recognizes the party. She will use the relatively neutral space of the auction to try to learn more about the characters and maybe even sway them to her side. Akkadia is not aware of Patrix's true intentions, but she will try to sow seeds of doubt about him anyway. Akkadia has come to the auction with valuable magic items and a large sum of money gained from her other heists. She will attempt to bid on the arm honestly, and if she wins, strike at Blrrk for the gem when she goes to make payment.

ADVERSARIES

King Blrrk has their chef **assassins** guarding the items being auctioned off. Other attendees at the auction include underworld figures, such as **Pork** and **Bean**. They will be willing to ally with the party or with **Akkadia** for the right price.

CONCLUSIONS

Whether Akkadia wins the auction or not, one of the Domarov sisters causes a distraction, and the other two attempt to grab the *gem of whirling cosmic thought** out of Blrrk's body.

If Blrrk loses their gem, they revert to the statistics of a **gelantinous cube**, and their criminal empire crumbles. Eventually, the rival crime boss, **Zara**, will take over much of Blrrk's operations.

Arc 3: Harathos

Starting Level 12th to 14th

SCENARIO

A Ring Fit for a King. **Akkadia** is planning to steal the *ring of the bound** from King Brenin [he/him] during his birthday celebration. The King is putting on a lavish garden party. However, it is heavily guarded as agents from rival nations have made several attempts on the King's life in recent days. King Brenin himself is already under the sway of **Harathos**, and is obsessed with achieving greatness through aggression toward other nations.

Close Up Magic. Akkadia plans to impersonate a noble ally of King Brenin and simply slip the ring from his finger using sleight of hand. However, the link between Brenin and the ring will make this exceptionally hard.

Invitation Inflitration. Patrix offers to supply the party with funds, but they will have to find their own way into the celebration to get the ring.

ADVERSARIES

King Brenin uses the statistics of a **knight** and is attuned to the *ring of the bound**. His court is filled with **nobles**, **knights**, and **guards**. He is also attended by his **archmage**, Pratima the Perspicacious [she/her]. Pratima is loyal to the king and does not want to see him harmed. She is aware of the ring's power but does not know how much of a threat it poses to King Brenin.

CONCLUSIONS

If Akkadia steals the ring, King Brenin's forces attempt to apprehend her and take it back. If Akkadia is caught, she appeals to the party for help, revealing a little about the truth about why she wants to restore the Horned Giant to save her mother. If one of the Domarov sisters is captured, the other two will stop at nothing to free her.

If the party takes the ring, Harathos haunts their dreams until they deliver it to Patrix. Harathos urges them to claim the ring for their own and seize greatness.

If King Brenin is killed, he rises again as a returned ruler.

Marija Tiurina

Federico Piatti

Arc 4: The Maker

Starting Level. 15th to 17th

SCENARIO

Snatching the Sword. Patrix calls the party to his mansion. He has discovered that the final piece Akkadia needs is a powerful magical sword and that she is targeting *Al-Babbage**, the sentient blade that powers the inventor known as The Maker.

The Maker's Trap. Unlike Akkadia's other targets, The Maker is expecting her and has prepared accordingly. She wants the pieces of the Horned Giant for herself as she believes that she could use the remnants of fiendish power within the bronze to forge extraordinary constructs. She already has the torso in her workshop. The Maker plans to capture Akkadia and force her to hand over the other parts of the statue.

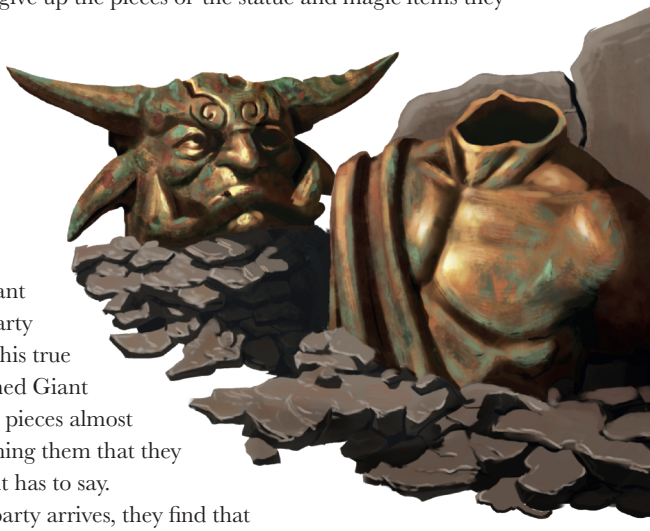
ADVERSARIES

The Maker's lair is heavily trapped and defended by her creations, including **animated armor** and **flying swords**.

CONCLUSIONS

If Akkadia or the party takes *Al-Babbage from The Maker,** the construct is drained of life, and her creations mill around aimlessly.

If The Maker captures one of the sisters who make up Akkadia, the others approach the party and try to strike a bargain to gain their aid in rescuing her. While the sisters remain convinced that the Horned Giant is the only one who can save their mother, they can't bear to see one of their sisters captured either. They would rather give up the pieces of the statue and magic items they have to the party than to The Maker.



Nicolas DeLuca

Arc 5: The Horned Giant

Starting Level 16th-18th

SCENARIO

Heading Toward the Finale. The Horned Giant's head, the final piece needed to restore the infernal statue, rests in a cave guarded by the immortal giant Pylenthia. Patrix is reluctant to send the party to meet her as he fears that she will reveal his true identity to them and the truth of the Horned Giant itself. However, with the race to gather the pieces almost at an end, he sends them to collect it, warning them that they must not listen to anything the cursed giant has to say.

Warning from The Past. When the party arrives, they find that Pylenthia is already speaking with one of the Domarov sisters, trying to convince her of the true dangers of the Horned Giant.

ADVERSARIES

Pylenthia lives alone in her remote cave. Though she will fight to defend herself and the Horned Giant's head, she does not want to kill anybody. If the party delivered any parts of the Horned Giant to Patrix, **Akkadia** tries to convince them not to trust him and to hand them over to her instead.

FINALE

Depending on how the campaign has progressed so far and who has the pieces of the Horned Giant, the scenario can proceed in several different ways.

If Akkadia has all the pieces needed to rebuild the Horned Giant, she reconstructs it, awakening the fiend Telyfios from within and unleashing untold destruction. Though the Domarov sisters succeed, and their mother is restored to health, everyone else in a 1-mile radius of the city where they assembled the statue is dead. Both their mother, an **archmage**, and the sisters themselves are cursed with immortality. The Horned Giant roams the land, dealing out death. Akkadia is filled with remorse, and the sisters seek out the party's help in destroying the Horned Giant once more.

If Patrix has all the pieces needed to rebuild the Horned Giant, he reveals his true identity as a cultist of Telyfios only once the reconstruction of the Horned Giant is complete. The Horned Giant has no interest in Patrix or the cult but is glad to be able to cause destruction and pain once more. It offers the party eternal life as thanks for helping reunite its scattered pieces. Whether the party accepts or not, the Horned Giant embarks on a rampage of destruction unless it is stopped.

If both Akkadia and Patrix have some of the pieces needed to rebuild the Horned Giant, Patrix demands that the party find Akkadia and retrieve the final pieces. He is growing increasingly desperate as he believes that unless he can restore the Horned Giant, Telyfios won't free him from the curse that causes creatures to hate him. At the same time, Akkadia is planning to steal the needed pieces back from Patrix. Once either side has all the pieces, they summon the Horned Giant.

If the party allied with Pylenthia, she asks them to help her hide the pieces once more, taking them back from either Akkadia or Patrix. The party and Pylenthia may also be able to convince Akkadia to abandon her quest for the Horned Giant by explaining the dark truth of the healing it offers.

FINALE ADVERSARIES

If the **Horned Giant** is reconstructed, only defeating it in combat will stop its life-sucking rampage. It is supported by Patrix and other **cultists of Telyfios**. If the party is actively aiding in the reconstruction of the Horned Giant, **Pylenthia** will be their enemy. If they are trying to stop it, then she will be their ally.

CONCLUSIONS

If the pieces are successfully hidden before it is summoned, the threat of the Horned Giant is ended, for now.

If the Horned Giant is destroyed, its pieces must be scattered and hidden once more. If Pylenthia still lives, she offers to take half of the pieces and asks the party to hide the others.

If the Horned Giant defeats the party, it continues its rampage of destruction, offering cursed immortality to those who want it and killing thousands in the process. If left unchecked, eventually, the only people left alive in the wasteland created by the Horned Giant are those who accepted its evil bargain.

Nicolas DeLuca

The Crystal's Call

Deep in the mines of Bog'rah Dihn, eldritch power lies dormant within shards of glowing crystal. The **Prince-in-Ivory** desires these crystals to beautify and expand his castle, as the crystals are actually the teeth of an ancient titan. The Prince is manipulating the Thorn Witch, **Exaxia**, forcing her to send her minions to the Bog'rah Dihn mines to collect them for him. This has disturbed the monstrous residents of the mine, **Tendon** and **Bone**, from their usual hunting grounds, forcing them to the surface to feed.

Arc 1: Tendon and Bone

Starting Level 5th to 7th

SCENARIO

The Request. The party is beseeched by the struggling village of Dihn Pit to defeat the monster that has been striking their homes at night. Rolam Brenck [he/they], the leader of Dihn Pit, has a second reason for wanting the monsters dead. He believes that the monster is the one that drove his ancestors away from the Bog'rah Dihn mine. Rolam wants to reopen the mine so the village can profit from the magical crystals found there once more.

The Clues. Nobody can agree on what the monster attacking Dihn Pit is—a spindly humanoid figure or a four-legged lizard with sharp teeth and scales made of stone. The villagers are scared, as the monster has been carrying off one of their numbers each night.

The Truth. The "monster" is actually a pair, **Tendon** and **Bone**. They have been disturbed from their usual hunting grounds within the crystal mines of Bog'rah Dihn by devotees of Exaxia. Driven by hunger, Tendon and Bone emerge to strike at the village of Dihn Pit before returning to the upper parts of the mines before dawn each day.

The Reward. The village has gathered a small amount of gold to serve as a reward for anyone who can save them from the monster. Rolam also promises a share of the profits from the mines if the village can reopen them.

ADVERSARIES

The mines contain predatory subterranean creatures, such as **darkmantles**, **ropers**, and **gricks**. Deep within the caverns, **devotees of Exaxia** are mining crystals.

CONCLUSIONS

If Tendon and Bone are defeated, signs of their previous fight with Exaxia's minions can be found on their bodies. A *thorn witch's stiletto** is buried in Bone's side, and Tendon shows signs of acid burns from the vials of corrosive sap hurled by the devotees of Exaxia.

The village of Dihn Pit celebrates the monsters' demise and rewards the party with the meager reward in gold that they were able to scrape together. The miners of Dihn Pit venture back into the tunnels in hopes of mining the crystals once more.

If Tendon and Bone survive, they return to the depths of Bog'rah Dihn and renew their fight against Exaxia's minions. One of the devotees of Exaxia emerges from the mines, fleeing back to their mistress, the Thorn Witch, in her forest nearby.

If the party ventures into the mine to discover what disturbed Tendon and Bone, they find the devotees of Exaxia toiling away, breaking off huge chunks of glowing crystal and carrying them up to the surface through a long mine shaft that emerges on the outskirts of Exaxia's forest. The devotees don't know why they have been asked to gather these crystals, but they are happy to do whatever their mistress demands of them.

Alex Stone & Henrik Rosenborg

Arc 2: Exaxia

Starting Level 6th to 8th

Scenario

The Request. The children of Dihn Pit contact the party to ask for help once more. They are worried about their parents, who have become obsessed with mining the crystals and carrying them into the forbidden woods.

Exaxia's Grip. As the miners of Dihn Pit reopen Bog'rah Dihn and begin working the mine again, Rolam Brenck is approached by a mysterious group hoping to invest. After a few weeks, Rolam and many of the other miners begin to act strangely. They have been inducted into the cult of Exaxia as devotees of Exaxia by other members of her cult, exposing them to her pollen. They begin to carry all the crystals they mine into the nearby woods, which have long been avoided as they are known to be the domain of a terrible spider-like creature, Exaxia.

Within The Woods. A new carrion plant has begun to grow among the bones of Exaxia's victims. She had been delighted by it and was caring for the terrible plant just like the smaller spiders it commands. However, the Prince stole the plant. He is blackmailing Exaxia with promises of its safe return in exchange for regular deliveries of the crystals from the mines of Bog'rah Dihn. He has established a permanent portal to his demiplane, Aethling, within Exaxia's forest to allow Exaxia to make deliveries. A tooth sprite named Daneous [she/her] is The Prince-in-Ivory's emissary to Exaxia. She floats close to Exaxia's side at all times, reminding her of the Prince's promises.

Plant Mom. Driven by her instincts, Exaxia will do nothing that risks the carrion plant. Though she has no personal interest in the crystals, she is keen to gather more minions that she can send to the mines.

Adversaries

Those who count themselves among the followers of the Thorn Witch include **cultists** and **cult fanatics**, the most ardent of which are transformed into **devotees of Exaxia**. In addition, **Exaxia** has granted the devotees pheromones to capture and tame plant monsters, such as **shambling mounds** and **treants**, to serve her.

Conclusions

If Exaxia is defeated and the supply of crystals is disrupted, the Prince is furious. He seeks revenge once he discovers who caused the disruption. The portal to his realm remains open until he realizes that the shipments of crystals have stopped. The people of Dihn Pit and the other devotees of Exaxia are freed from her influence and can return home.

If Exaxia survives, fearing for the safety of the carrion plant, she will not betray the Prince-In-Ivory. Though she is reluctant to leave her forest, she will do so if she believes she can defeat the party. If no other options remain, she flees through the portal to Aethling to warn the Prince.

If Daneous the sprite is captured, she shares what she knows about the Prince's plans in exchange for guarantees of her safety. She fears the Prince but feels no loyalty to him.

Alex Stone & Henrik Rosenborg

Arc 3: The Prince-In-Ivory

Starting Level 8th to 10th

Sam Mameli

SCENARIO

The Prince-In-Ivory seeks the crystals to increase the power of his castle and expand his demiplane so that it can hold even more treasures. As the crystals are remnants of a titan's teeth, they have great power. Depending on what the party chooses to do, the campaign can continue in two ways:

Into Aethling. If the party passes through the portal to Aethling from Exaxia's forest, they find themselves in the Treasury of the Prince's castle. The Prince-in-Ivory can be found in his throne room. If he discovers that the party is in his castle, he sends all of his forces against them. The Prince is filled with unquenchable rage that his plans to enlarge his castle with the crystals have been disrupted.

The Prince's Revenge. If the party does not head into Aethling within a few days, eventually, the Prince will discover that they are partially responsible for the flow of crystals stopping. He sends his sprites to abduct the children of Dihn Pit, who asked for the party's help, as punishment for daring to interfere with his plans. He also sends tooth golems to attack the party every night. To rescue the children and end the Prince's campaign against them, the party must find a way into the demiplane Aethling and take on the Prince.

ADVERSARIES

In addition to his usual retinue of **tooth golem** and **tooth sprite** servants, the **Prince-in-Ivory** also commands malevolent fey such as **green hags**, enthralled humanoid **knights** and **veterans**, as well as captured giants such as **trolls** and **ogres** who have been either charmed or bribed into fighting for him.

CONCLUSIONS

If the Prince is defeated, the children of Dihn Pit can be rescued and returned to their homes. The people of Dihn Pit choose to close down the mine once more, afraid of the dangerous forces it has attracted.

In Aethling, one of the tooth sprites rises to become a new monarch over the enameled realm, vowing to be a kinder ruler than the Prince. The new ruler has tooth sprites leave a handsome reward of gold pieces under the party's pillows on their first night back in the Material Plane as a token of thanks and appreciation.

If the Prince defeats the party, he keeps them captive in the dungeons of his castle. He ventures out into the Material Plane to find another Big Bad to manipulate into fetching him the crystals he desires.

Federico Piatti

Ruin of the Rune

The rumblings of ancient power and unspeakable evil are contained in a dangerous spell book known as the *Red Rune**. It has fallen into the hands of a powerful mage named **Magda**, and unless someone finds a way to uncover its secrets and thwart the evil contained within, the world will suffer for it. After encountering Magda, the party must seek out the secrets of the evil book she carries in an abandoned library. There, they can encounter **Daniel**, the failed flesh golem. With the knowledge they gain, the party will be able to track Magda to her hideout, but not in time to stop **Rel'Um** from possessing her. If they survive the final confrontation, the party can choose to enter the book and free Magda or leave both her and Rel'Um trapped inside forever.

Act 1: Magda

Starting Level 9th to 12th

Scenario

Magda has been led by the *Red Rune** to one of the Towers of Rel'Um and has started establishing a base of power for herself and her followers. She believes Rel'Um's lies that they are two halves of the same divine soul and is following Rel'Um's instructions to gather as many souls as she can into the network of Towers. Magda starts by targeting those she feels deserve punishment, such as bandits and pirates, but Rel'Um demands more and more souls.

After Magda decimates an entire caravan of traders, the survivors ask the party to seek her out and stop her terrible actions.

Adversaries

In addition to controlling two **guardians of Rel'Um**, Magda has amassed a following of Rel'Um'Kin **cultists** eager to serve her wishes, which include **veterans** led by **mages** seeking a fraction of Magda's power.

Conclusions

If Magda is brought close to death, she teleports away to one of the other Towers of Rel'Um to recuperate and plan her next move.

If the party defeats Magda, Rel'Um won't risk further harm to her and exerts considerable power to teleport Magda's body to another of the Towers of Rel'Um. There, her remaining cultists hide and heal her.

If Magda defeats the party, she keeps them captive, seeking ways to extract their power and add it to her own.

Act 2: Daniel

Starting Level 12th to 15th

Scenario

Ancient Archives. The party is approached by an unexpected ally, a dragonborn **mage** named Austrid [they/them]. Austrid has spent their life studying the mysteries surrounding one of their ancestors, the archmage Talera, whose death created the *Red Rune**. Austrid has heard of Magda's rise to power and that she carries the cursed tome. They ask the party to come with them to the ruins of an ancient library in the abandoned mage college of Crownsfall. Austrid believes that the library holds information that could help stop Magda and the *Red Rune**.

Abandoned Academy. Crownsfall was once a thriving hub of the arcane arts but fell into ruin after a particularly powerful creature—Daniel—was brought in for study. During the ensuing chaos, the campus was magically sealed to prevent its escape. Austrid has the key but is unsure if they will survive inside alone. Daniel still lives inside, unable to pass beyond the magic barrier that keeps it trapped and unable to hug anyone.

Kayal Cline

Damn, It's Daniel. As soon as Daniel senses the presence of people it can love, the failed flesh golem will approach its new friends. While it won't stop them from exploring the library, neither will it let them leave.

ADVERSARIES

Escaped arcane experiments have taken over the overgrown campus grounds, forming a new and dangerous ecosystem of **chimeras**, **cockatrices**, **owlbears**, and **gorgons**. Though they know to avoid **Daniel**, any other creature that enters Crownsfall risks becoming their prey.

CONCLUSIONS

If the party enters the library, they discover fragments of information about the *Red Rune**. By putting these together, the party can learn the truth that Rel'Um is not a god, as Magda believes, but an ancient mage. They can also learn the story of Talera and Rel'Um's friendship and final confrontation, as well as the location of the center of Rel'Um's Towers, where Magda plans to enact the ritual to restore Rel'Um.

If Daniel lives, it attempts to follow the party out of Crownsfall. From there, it roams the land looking for people to love.

Act 3: Rel'Um

Starting Level 18th to 20th

SCENARIO

Even with the fragments of information found in the abandoned college, it will take time to find Magda. The party arrives just in time to witness Magda complete the ritual and to see **Rel'Um** take over her body. Rel'Um will attempt to retreat and amass more power before confronting the party directly. She must visit each of her Towers as part of her final ritual, in which she plans to become the laws of magic.

ADVERSARIES

When **Rel'Um** takes over Magda's body, she will draw out the souls of the less powerful Rel'Um'Kin now at her disposal to create **gloomwrithes**. The stronger Rel'Um'Kin, such as **archmages**, she sends to harass the party and prevent them from interfering with her preparations. With enough time to prepare, Rel'Um can also summon fiendish servants like **nalfeshnees** and **horned devils**.

CONCLUSIONS

If the party can defeat Rel'Um in Magda's body, they will still have to enter the Red Rune and defeat her in her **kraken** form if they wish to destroy her entirely or save Magda.

If Magda regains control of her body, she will be thankful to the party for saving her. She feels a deep shame at being taken in by Rel'Um's lies and wants to destroy any remaining traces of Rel'Um, such as the Towers and any lingering gloomwrithes. After that, Magda may become a force for good or for evil.

If Rel'Um is defeated but not destroyed inside the *Red Rune,** the book now houses the spirits of both Rel'Um and Magda. Should the two ever be able to work together, it will become an even more dangerous artifact.

Kayla Cline

Federico Piatti

Worse Things Happen At Sea

Out in the vast sea lie things beyond mortal comprehension. This campaign framework has adventurers take to the high seas to tangle with **Shen** and two rival pirate crews— **Fulmini's** vampirates and the pi-rats of **The Melcombe**, before facing the wrath of the oceanic elemental **Saewyn**. Shen, Fulmini, and The Melcombe are locked in a three-way tussle for control of the seas. The party can choose to ally themselves with one side or none.

Arc 1: Shen vs. Fulmini vs. The Melcombe

Starting Level 8th to 13th

Scenario

Lost At Sea. Ships have been disappearing under mysterious circumstances from a busy shipping lane near the port town of Plumb Cove. Some ships are found derelict with no crew or supplies in sight, while others disappear entirely. The party is hired by the town council to uncover what is going on and stop it if they can. The town can offer the services of a galley named The Dawn's Revenge and a crew to sail it.

Clues and Rumors. Only one survivor has made it back to Plumb Cove from one of the vanished ships. A weathered sailor, Kingsley Dram [he/him], was found clinging to a piece of driftwood. He claims that before his ship was attacked, the rigging turned into snakes. Kingsley saw two vessels approaching through a thick fog before he was thrown overboard as his ship lurched unnaturally. In truth, the snakes were an illusion caused by Shen. One of the ships belonged to Captain **Fulmini**, and the other was **The Melcombe**.

Shen's Secrets. The sea dragon **Shen** has been disturbed by Fulmini's search for the body of her lost love Annabeth. Annabeth's bones have drifted into Shen's nest, and the dragon refuses to let the vampirate come close for fear she will harm Shen's eggs. Unable to tell the difference between Fulmini's fleet and other ships that mean her no harm, Shen has been using her illusions to confound any ships that sail above her lair.

Fulmini's Fury. Fulmini has identified that the bones of her deceased lover Annabeth are within Shen's lair. Frustrated by the dragon's defensive trickery, Fulmini has decided to overwhelm Shen with sheer force. She has been capturing the crews of ships and turning them into vampirates, forming an armada of ships under her command. Fulmini is dead set on retrieving Annabeth's bones and has developed a true hatred for Shen. Her efforts are also being disrupted by The Melcombe, which is picking off members of her fleet.

The Melcombe's Mark. The rats of the Melcombe are desperately hungry. The disruptions to the shipping lanes caused by Fulmini have left them with fewer targets to prey on. When they do manage to capture a ship, the rats consume the entire crew and all the edible stores. The rats know that this is not enough to sustain themselves, though. They want to stop Fulmini's attacks so that they can feast on the ships instead.

Isabela Duffles & Alex Stone

ADVERSARIES

The waters around Plumb Cove are infested with **swarms of quippers** and are home to **merrows** as well as groups of **sahuagin** who worship **Shen** as a fearsome sea goddess. The sea is also home to **hunter sharks**, **giant sharks**, **giant crabs** beneath the waves, and **will-o'-wisps** that light the surface.

Fulmini has amassed a fleet of ships, each crewed by **wereoctopuses** and **vampirates**, transformed members of the ships' original crews.

Sometimes The Melcombe moors close to Plumb Cove and sends a disguised **pi-rat** into town to gather information by visiting dingy bars and steal supplies. The pi-rats are willing to bargain and will do almost anything in exchange for a steady food supply.

CONCLUSIONS

However, the party decides to tackle this three-way conflict between the Big Bads, at a climactic moment, a huge storm sweeps over the ocean, washing any survivors toward **Saewyn's** floating isle. These survivors could include any combination of the party plus Shen, Fulmini and her crew, and The Melcombe.

Arc 2: Saewyn

Starting level 12th to 15th

SCENARIO

Welcome to Saewyn's Domain. In the aftermath of the sea battle between Shen, Fulmini, and the Melcombe, the survivors are washed ashore on Saewyn's roaming island. By the time anyone awakes, the island has drifted far from Plumb Cove.

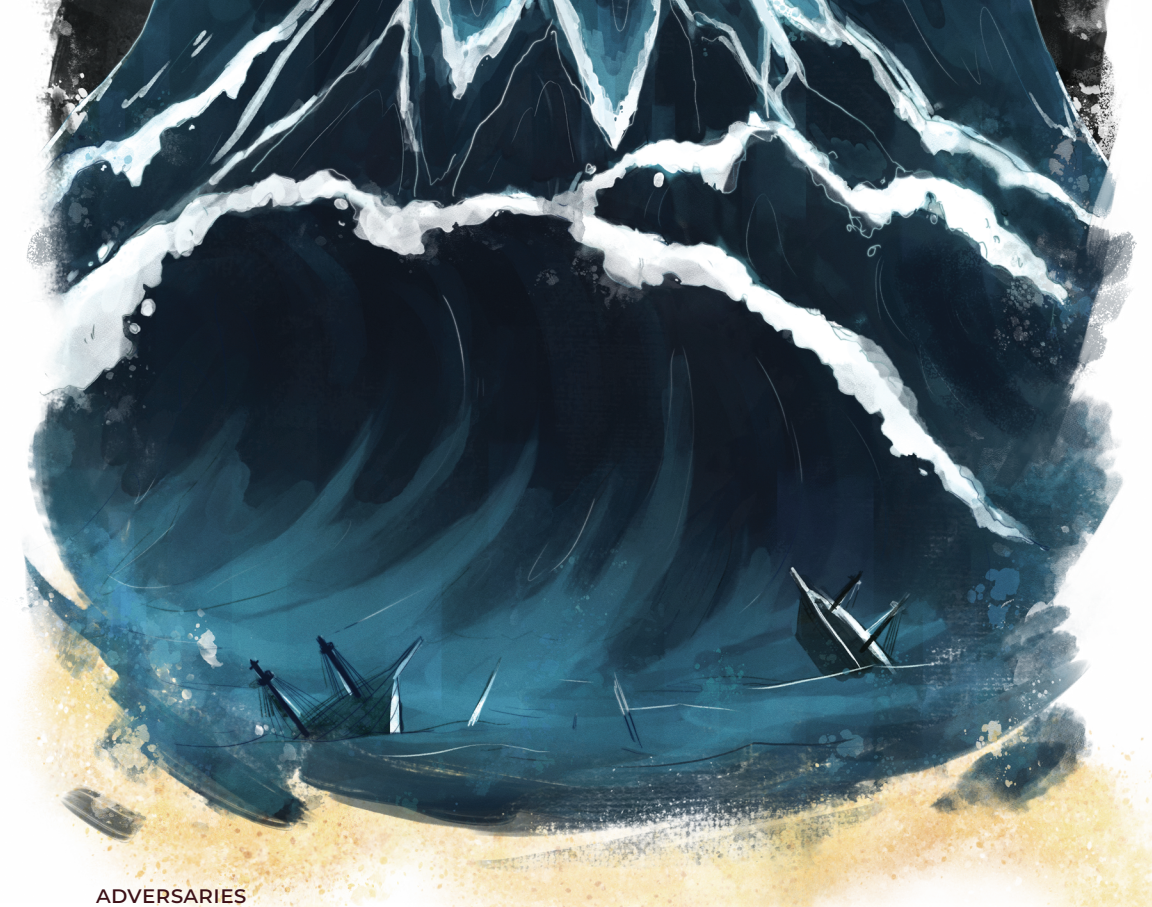
If Shen is washed to Saewyn's island, she finds a sympathetic welcome from Saewyn. The two bond over their shared sadness. Shen wants to get back to her lair and fears for what will happen to her eggs while she is gone. However, she has been injured in the storm and must recuperate before she can swim home.

If Fulmini and her crew are washed ashore, their ships are destroyed. The harsh sun that beats down on the isle forces the vampirates to hide in the volcanic caves, only emerging at night. They will wait for either the rats of the Melcombe or the party to construct a way off the island before they strike and try to take it for themselves.

If the Melcombe is washed aground, the rats focus on collecting supplies to repair their grounded ship. They get into scraps with Saewyn's sand soldiers and will attack any of Fulmini's surviving crew. Saewyn is not pleased with having the rats on her island and wants them gone. She does not appreciate them gnawing down her trees to use as lumber.

If only the party is washed ashore, they find the island deserted except for Saewyn and her sand soldiers. Pieces of wreckage from their ship wash ashore, too, filling Saewyn with sadness and rage that yet another forest has been felled to make vessels for warring humanoids. Saewyn does not welcome them, and they must find a way to escape her island or win her over and gain her aid.

Isabela Duffles, Avery Howett & Alex Stone



ADVERSARIES

Saewyn is protective of her island and will defend it and herself. However, she won't seek out the party to destroy them unless they do something to upset her. Her **sand soldiers** keep a close eye on the party and anyone else who is shipwrecked. With their ships either totally or partially destroyed, the **vampirates** and the **pi-rats** may be open to alliance with the party.

CONCLUSIONS

If The Melcombe is refloated, the pi-rats attempt to leave the island. If Fulmini and her vampirates are on the island, they will attempt to take the ship from the rats, potentially coming under the effect of the *psychic hubs**.

If the party constructs a way off the island, they come under attack from any surviving vampirates. Saewyn will not pursue them beyond her waters, but neither will she make their passage easy. Depending on whether the party has respected her island or not, Saewyn may attempt to sink them.

If Fulmini was able to retrieve Annabeth's bones from Shen, she has her lover resurrected. The two share a touching reunion and swear to seek revenge against everyone and everything they feel has wronged them.

If Shen is on the island, she slowly recovers with Saewyn's care. Once she is strong enough, she returns to her eggs, though she also promises Saewyn that she will seek out news of her lover, Bosa.

Isabela Duffles

The Big Bad Bureau Wants You

This chapter details the Big Bad Bureau, a multiverse-spanning organization tasked with keeping Big Bads everywhere in line. Using the information detailed here, GMs can introduce the Bureau into their existing campaigns as a new faction and source of information for players. Alternatively, the Bureau can be the focus of a whole campaign, with players taking on the roles of Bureau agents, dealing with a variety of Big Bads on a daily basis.

What is the Big Bad Bureau?

Light and dark, good and evil: you can't have one without the other. In the cosmic waltz of the multiverse, some consider this balance to be more important than anything else, and the Bureau was founded with the sole purpose of maintaining that balance.

When it comes to when the Bureau was founded, and by who, historical records are hazy to say the least. The fact of the matter is that no one truly knows. Records in the Bureau archives go back for millennia, but there is nothing to indicate when the Bureau first opened. Official recruitment pamphlets say that the Big Bad Bureau was founded by "an ancient order of monks who dedicated their lives to maintaining the eternal balance of good and evil," but most agents agree this is just propaganda to give the organization an air of mystery and gravitas. As an agent moves up the ranks, they may eventually be let in on a truth about the Bureau, but it may not be the truth, just one of many competing rumors.

Rumored Origin Stories of the Big Bad Bureau

- A celestial who believed in the true neutral balance of the universe created the Bureau—originally a group of adventurers known as "The Order of Equilibrium"—and that the celestial still monitors the Bureau to this day.
- An obsessive archivist from a cosmic library on the elemental plane of air founded the Bureau as a way to collect information about the multiverse's greatest villains. Any good deeds done are secondary.
- The Bureau has always been, and always will be. As soon as the first villain hatched a sinister plan, the Bureau was already there to keep them in line.

The Role of the Bureau

The Big Bad Bureau's mission centers around one core philosophy: there can be no good without evil, and vice versa. The multiverse needs heroes; to inspire, to give hope to those without, and to encourage people to aspire to better things. Heroic figures aren't created in a vacuum, though. They need villains to fight against and evil plots to foil.

The Bureau's agents, however, are not those heroes. They don't take on the villains of the multiverse themselves, but instead, make sure those villains are kept under control and monitored until it's time for the real heroes to step in.

Most Bureau missions fall into two categories: active situations, and research. Active situations involve tracking down missing Big Bads, settling feuds between them, and responding to any unpredictable or unprecedented behaviors from the villains they monitor. Research missions are more investigative in nature and are considered the core of an agent's work. Indeed, the Bureau's top priority is researching and studying Big Bads to get ahead of 'active situations' before they happen. Knowledge is power.

The Structure of the Bureau

The Big Bad Bureau has two main parts: the field agents, and a management branch that deals with the internal workings of the Bureau itself. While the Bureau expects a certain amount of chaos from field agents, the management branch is expected to run like a well-oiled machine. Paperwork, red tape, and oversight are priorities for the Bureau because if one mission is mismanaged lives, can be lost. The Bureau depends on the public trusting them to keep them safe; injuries, accidents, death and destruction do not foster that kind of trust. Additionally, potential agents would be much less inclined to join an organization that endangers the lives of its employees needlessly. To this end, the Bureau wants casualties—both agents and civilians—to be minimal.

Bureau Management Roles

Clerk. The rank and file of the bureaucratic arm of the Bureau, tasked with filing, note taking, administration, and coffee runs. There are 25 to 30 clerks working at any time.

Analyst. All the field research and reconnaissance gathered by agents ends up in the hands of the analysts, who dissect it and turn it into case files on each of the Big Bads. They create and update the Big Bad dossiers and provide written briefs to field agents before missions.

Quartermaster. The Quartermaster maintains the Bureau's collection of equipment and magic items, making sure agents have what they need for missions. The current Quartermaster for the Big Bad Bureau is Argos Brom [they/them], a dwarf **mage** who has held the position for more than 80 years.

Head Archivist. Ensuring that the Bureau's archives are well cataloged and highly fortified is the job of the Head Archivist. The current Head Archivist is a **green hag** called Etheldreda Strunk [she/they]. She is relatively new to the role after the previous Head Archivist met a sticky end while reshelving an ominous orb. Etheldreda is determined to prove themself worthy and strictly enforces the archive's rules, but she likes to socialize when she's off the clock.

Department Head. Each Department Head manages a specific branch of the Big Bad Bureau. Depending on the importance of the branch, the Department Head may be the only employee in the department, but they often have a few clerks supporting their work and the larger departments also employ two to five specialized agents.

Deputy Bureau Chief. The Deputy Chief is in charge of the day-to-day management of the field agents. Delivering standard mission briefs, training, and discipline are their main responsibilities. The current Deputy Bureau Chief of the Big Bad Bureau is Bola Fangheart [she/her] a stern hobgoblin **assassin** with an eyepatch and a 'tough love' management style.

Alyse Stewart

Bureau Chief. Keeping an eye on the Bureau's big picture plans is the Bureau Chief. The Chief has the last word on any major decisions, including which missions to prioritize. They are also the face of the Bureau's public relations, making appearances at conferences and clandestine meetings across the multiverse. The current Chief of the Big Bad Bureau is Runcible Scowler [he/him], a green dragonborn (**half-red dragon veteran** with poison breath instead of fire breath.) He has a fondness for the field agents that he works hard to hide behind a gruff exterior.

The Director. Behind all the public-facing aspects of the Bureau, behind the paperwork, and the bluster of the field agents is "The Director." This shadowy entity (or entities?) has never been seen by any living agent of the Bureau and communicates exclusively with the Chief via a vacuum messenger tube in his office.

Departments of the Bureau

The Bureau spawns new departments regularly, though most are run by a single, very stressed clerk. A department might do specialized research on a specific type of Big Bad or handle a certain aspect of Bureau operations. A sampling of the departments that agents may interact with are listed here.

Department of Interdimensional Affairs (DIA). It's the DIA's job to monitor the Inner, Outer, and Prime Material planes of existence for new threats. The DIA also facilitates getting agents to and from those planes.

Department of Magic Containment and Control (DMCC). This department is in charge of finding ways to manage Big Bads that use powerful sorcery. Due to the unpredictable effects, out-of-control power levels, and potent defenses that it can provide, magic is a major concern for the Bureau.

Department of Festive Foes (DFF). Some unscrupulous Big Bads theme their vile activities around popular holidays. The DFF keeps an eye on anyone who falls under this particular category of rotten.

Department of Filing, Managing, and Storing Records, Documents and Evidence (DFMSRDE) A.K.A. The Catalog Room. An archive of artifacts, samples, and records collected over the entire existence of the Big Bad Bureau. The organization method is impossible to understand without training by a sanctioned Bureau archivist.

Alyse Stewart

Chief Runcible Scowler

Some More Esoteric Departments:

- Department of Lesser Evils (DLE)
- Department of Moderate Evils (DME)
- Department of Events Yet To Pass (DEYTP)
- Department of Minion Management (DMM)
- Accounting, Treasure, and Hoards Department (ATHD)
- Department of Maladies, Injuries, and Diseases (DMID)
- Humanoid Resources (HR)

Big Bad Bureau Headquarters

The location of Bureau HQ is a closely guarded secret—so secret that no one who works there can quite agree on the truth. It has to be somewhere, of course, but exactly where is difficult to nail down. Considering there is no front door, and the only way to enter or exit is through a teleportation circle in the front lobby, most agents just assume that the Bureau is its own demiplane, accessible only to those who know how. This flexible location and the Bureau's ever-growing network of teleportation circles, portals, and multiplanar doorways means that the Bureau is everywhere all at once.

The Bureaucratic Maze

Much like its location, the physical size of the Bureau HQ is unknown. With seemingly endless room for expansion, the halls of the Bureau spiral out in all directions, making it too easy for even a seasoned agent to get completely lost on the way to their morning meeting. Windows are a rare commodity and those that do exist look out onto disparate landscapes, from frozen tundras to sunny beaches. Those who try to access these vistas via doors that share a wall with one of these windows find that the door leads to just another boring conference room or wood-paneled hallway. Bureau employees who have examined these windows closely have discovered they are just elaborately detailed illusions.

The Wall of Bells

In the main planning room for the Bureau is a wall covered in bells of all sizes. Each one is connected to a Big Bad under the Bureau's watch and is carefully constructed from materials tied to the Big Bad it represents. Tussentenner's bell, for example, is massive—over three feet tall—and uses one of the giant's own teeth as its ringer. On the other hand, the bell dedicated to the squabbling goblinoids Pork and Bean consists of small brass sculptures of their heads that bash together when they ring.

This magical connection to Big Bads allows for advanced alerts. A bell rings when the connected Big Bad goes somewhere they shouldn't be or otherwise breaks their documented patterns.

Magic and Technology

According to some of the oldest archival blueprints and maps of the Bureau HQ, its offices once looked more like medieval dungeons than modern workspaces. Over time, as the organization expanded and interacted with more worlds and peoples, the Bureau saw more and more advancements and upgrades to its facilities. Now, instead of mundane torches, the hallways and offices are lit by magically enhanced lights. The age of some of the enhancements cause some of the bulbs to flicker periodically.

Communication between departments and offices relies on special tele-spheres, which allow for remote conversations between agents. Documents are moved around HQ using pneumatic tubes that line every hallway. The sound of pneumatic canisters zipping violently through the tubes is a common first fright for new recruits.

To get around, most agents simply traverse Bureau HQ on foot. Major departments are connected by interoffice teleportation circles. Using personal transportation inside the Bureau is technically not allowed, but that doesn't stop stubborn agents from using bicycles, mounts, and magic to get around faster.

Becoming a Bureau Agent

There are a few qualities that make a good Big Bad Bureau agent: combat capabilities, negotiation skills, flexibility, a knack for problem-solving, and critical thinking. The most prized asset an agent can have, and the hardest to find, is a willingness to actually be a Bureau agent. It's thankless, dangerous work, and even the best agents of the Bureau tend to disappear into obscurity. Retired or deceased agents earn little more than their name and service number added to a dingy brass plaque in a forgotten hallway of Bureau HQ.

Recruitment

Bureau recruiters scour the multiverse for potential new agents, sniffing out that crucial combination of talent and desperation. The bulk of Bureau recruits are found at the bottom of adventuring guilds rosters, C and D-level adventurers without the talent to be big, darn heroes. They may be hearty fighters or cunning strategists, but lack the temperament—and often morals—to be true champions of good. These not-quite-heroes get scooped up by the Bureau with the promise of making a difference in the multiverse, and most of them jump at the opportunity.

On occasion, the Bureau finds itself needing the expertise of a more unsavory type of character, and recruits from a prison or criminal organization. These types of recruits are usually classified as 'consultants' and rarely given the full title of agent. The Bureau usually offers payment for these 'consulting services' in the form of pardons for lesser crimes and transportation to safe havens. Bureau agents keep a close eye on these temporary recruits until their contract ends.

Finally, the rarest recruits are the agents who seek out the post themselves. These recruits tend to have personal reasons for wanting to work with the Bureau. In many cases, a Big Bad impacted their life in some way, and they see the Bureau as a way to get revenge on the villain. While the Bureau doesn't tolerate unauthorized pursuit of a Big Bad, senior agents and trainers try to find constructive outlets for this vengeful passion to achieve the Bureau's goals. On rare occasions, firsthand experience with the Bureau compels an agent to seek employment with them. The Bureau may have secured their town, or a Bureau agent may have rescued a family member or even the recruit themselves, inspiring them to sign up.

Training

The majority of agent training takes place in the field. New recruits are paired with a more experienced agent and sent on their first mission before the ink on their intake paperwork is dry. This shadowing of a senior agent continues for four or five more missions, after which time the higher ups evaluate their performance. If they deem the recruit to be Bureau material, they officially become a junior agent of the Bureau. Recruits who fail to meet the Bureau's standards are returned to their mundane lives with their minds wiped and nothing but a confusing period of missing time—a souvenir of their experience.

Agents are expected to be well versed in all Bureau protocol, including the rules of engagement, use of specialty equipment, and proper paperwork filing. All of these protocols are detailed in the Bureau Agent Handbook, and every junior agent receives a copy along with their badge.

If an agent shows specialized skills, such as a talent for spellcasting or healing, they may be offered additional training. These agents will often be transferred to special departments within the Bureau.

Moving Up the Ranks

As its name suggests, the Big Bad Bureau is a bureaucracy at its core. Advancing through the organization requires time, effort, dedication, as well as the approval of senior staff.

Field Agent Ranks

Rank	Average Character Level	Requirements
Recruit	1	Invitation by Bureau recruiter
Junior Agent	4	Completion of five missions as a recruit, approval by Deputy Chief or higher
Senior Agent	8	Five or more years of experience with the Bureau, written commendation from Department Head or higher
Specialist	8	Five or more years of experience with the Bureau, written commendation from Department Head or higher, additional specialized training
Supervisory Agent	12	Ten or more years of experience with the Bureau, written commendation from Deputy Chief or higher

Recruit. Hand-chosen by Bureau recruiters and tested over five missions to see if they are fit to become a full-fledged agent. About 20 percent of recruits become junior agents.
Junior Agent. Around 40 junior agents make up the bulk of all field agents working for the Bureau at any given time. Hungry and looking to prove themselves.
Senior Agent. Twelve to fifteen senior agents can be found amongst the Bureau's ranks, hard-working individuals who have proven themselves to be reliable and trustworthy.
Specialists. Senior agents who have demonstrated unique abilities are valuable assets in the field. Often, they have spellcasting abilities or have innate powers.
Supervisory Agent. High-ranking and experienced individuals who lead teams of junior and senior agents on important missions. They often have the ear of the Deputy Bureau Chief.

New Player Options

New Background: Big Bad Bureau Field Agent

Skill Proficiencies: Athletics, Investigation
Tool Proficiencies: disguise kit, thieves' tools
Equipment: A Big Bad Bureau badge* and ID, on-duty Bureau uniform (fine clothes), desktop nameplate, and 15 gp.

Hunches

Being a Bureau agent isn't just about fighting; you're also an investigator and need to be able to trust your hunches. Every field agent worth their paycheck has a different way to sense when they are on the right track. Choose or roll on the table below to define the gut feeling your hunches give you.

d8	Hunches
1	My fingers drum a beat on my leg or a nearby surface.
2	I click my tongue faster and faster as I get closer to the truth.
3	I start to laugh sporadically as I make connections between clues.
4	I hum a familiar tune while processing details.
5	I roll a coin over my knuckles as I ponder a case. When I hit on the answer, I flip it.
6	When I touch things that might be clues, it's almost as if they are whispering to me.

Feature: Flash The Badge

Your Bureau badge gives you an air of authority wherever you are and can sometimes get you in places you wouldn't normally have access to as a civilian. People are also more likely to cooperate with you when you show your badge, although it could just as easily have the opposite effect on anyone bearing a guilty conscience.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

The average Bureau agent has an analytical mind, a knack for piecing together clues and an interest in discovering new details on their targets. The line between focus and obsession is a narrow one, however, and becoming overly invested in the job is not uncommon.

d8	Personality Trait
1	I am always ready with a quip or comment, appropriate or not.
2	I like to brag about the Big Bads I've encountered.
3	I bombard new recruits with unsolicited advice.
4	I believe you can never be over-prepared when dealing with a Big Bad.
5	I get a thrill from filing extremely detailed reports in a timely fashion.
6	I've seen so many world-ending events averted that I am incredibly laid-back.
7	I have become jaded and cynical, viewing the Big Bads as little more than pests.
8	I'm a Big Bad super fan and like to collect their autographs or mementos of our encounters.

d6	Ideal
1	Understanding. I find good things in all creatures, even Big Bads. (Good)
2	Balance. The world needs good and evil in equal measure. (Neutral)
3	Innovation. I love finding unconventional solutions to problems. (Chaotic)
4	Discipline. If you don't follow protocol, you pay in blood. (Lawful)
5	Control. Someone needs to keep these Big Bads in line, and that someone is me. (Evil)
6	Exploration. Traveling the multiverse for the Bureau lets me experience things I could never have imagined. (Chaotic)

d6	Bond
1	I was rescued by a senior agent while I was a new recruit. I want to pay this forward.
2	I lost a teammate on a dangerous mission. I won't let that happen to anyone again.
3	A specific Big Bad took something important from me. I have to make them pay.
4	I am in a clandestine relationship with someone in another department. I have to get back to them safely.
5	My parental figure was a Bureau agent. I might not be able to live up to their legacy but I'm going to try.
6	My unbreakable bond with my team of agents was forged in fire and pain.

d6	Flaw
1	I can't control my temper during diplomatic missions.
2	I am easily swayed by smooth-talking Big Bads.
3	I will risk myself and my team if it makes for a more daring story.
4	I don't take the threat of the Big Bads seriously enough.
5	I make others do my paperwork for me.
6	I won't back down from a fight, whether it's with a Big Bad or my supervisor.

New Feats

ARCHIVIST TRAINING. You have learned how to access and understand the Bureau's filing systems with relative ease. You gain the following benefits.

- Increase your Intelligence or Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You gain expertise with the Intelligence (Investigation) skill if you don't already have it. You add double your proficiency bonus to checks made with it.
- You can cast the legend lore spell a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus without requiring material components or expending a spell slot. Your spellcasting ability for this spell is Intelligence. You regain all uses of this benefit when you finish a long rest. You can only gain information from this spell that is stored or recorded in the Big Bad Bureau archives.

BIG BAD BATTLER. Your experience dealing with creatures bigger than you has given you a distinct tactical edge against them. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Strength or Dexterity score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You have advantage on any Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check you make to avoid or escape from being grappled by creatures that are Large or bigger.
- When you are hit by a melee attack by a Large or bigger creature, you can use your reaction to make a melee attack against that creature with advantage. On a hit, this attack deals additional damage depending on the size of the target: 1d8 for a Large creature, 1d10 for a Huge creature, or 1d12 for a Gargantuan creature. You can use this ability a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus and regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING. You have taken additional training on managing and organizing Bureau agents on missions. You gain the following benefits.

- Increase your Charisma or Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You have advantage on Charisma checks when encouraging, inspiring, and commanding allies and friendly creatures.
- You can cast the heroism spell a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus without expending a spell slot. Your spellcasting ability for this spell is Charisma. You regain all expended uses of this benefit when you finish a long rest.

Field Equipment

Bureau field agents often find themselves in high pressure situations, and being caught without the right equipment can result in disaster. Agents of all levels are issued basic, nonmagical weapons and armor as needed, but more experienced agents are sometimes trusted with specialized gear.

Standard Issue

The type of equipment issued to a Bureau agent depends on their rank and the requirements of the mission.

Recruit. New recruits are provided with basic weapons and equipment. Fresh recruits often prefer to use their own equipment until they become official agents.

Junior Agent. At this rank, martially trained agents are issued a +1 weapon that they are proficient with, and spellcasters are given a spellcasting focus that grants a +1 bonus to spell attack rolls and spell save DC appropriate to their class. Agents who take on a support role are often provided a cloak of protection to boost their defenses.

Senior Agent. Senior agents get upgraded magical equipment, with the bonuses of the equipment increased to +2 in most cases. A ring of protection is also standard equipment for agents at this rank.
Special Equipment. Specific missions might require special magic items, assigned on a case by case basis. For example, a mission to interact with an aquatic Big Bad will require that non-amphibious field agents be given potions of water breathing to facilitate their underwater mission.

Healing in the Field

On missions where combat is expected or injury is likely, each agent is issued one or two *potions of healing* for use if no agent with healing abilities is present or the team gets split up.

Special Bureau Equipment

The Big Bad Bureau has a few proprietary magic items that have been created specifically for Bureau missions.

BIG BAD BUREAU BADGE

Wondrous item, rare

This polished brass badge bears the emblem of the Big Bad Bureau. Each badge is bonded to a specific Bureau agent by a simple blood ritual. Once bonded, the badge allows Bureau HQ to track the agent's current location, as well as alert HQ if the agent has fallen unconscious on duty. The use of an identify spell on the badge identifies the agent as an official Bureau agent, revealing the agent's name, rank, and badge number.

COMMUNICATION RING

Ring, uncommon (requires attunement)

This simple brass ring allows agents to communicate quickly and subtly in the field. While wearing the ring, you can use an action to cast the message cantrip, by holding the ring up to your ear.

DRONE OF SILENCE

Wondrous item, rare

This small metal drone weighs 5 pounds. As an action, you can press a small button on the bottom of the drone to activate it. Pressing this button a second time deactivates the drone. Once activated, the drone hovers 5 feet off the ground but must be moved manually by pushing it along or tethering the drone to a creature with a chain or rope.

While active, the drone creates a 20-foot-radius sphere of silence as though the silence spell has been cast centered on itself. This sphere moves with the drone. This effect lasts for 10 minutes or until the drone of silence is deactivated by pressing the button again. Once the drone has been activated, it cannot be activated again until the next dawn.

UNIVERSAL CASE FILE

Wondrous Item, uncommon

This manila folder contains a single blank sheet of paper. By holding your hand over the closed folder and speaking a keyword and the name of a currently registered Big Bad, you can summon a copy of the Big Bad's case file from the Bureau archives, which appears inside the folder. Speaking the keyword again dismisses the case file.

Running a Big Bad Bureau Campaign

Each Big Bad presented in this book has enough content to fuel a campaign on their own, but a campaign themed around the Big Bad Bureau can provide a way to integrate multiple Big Bads into one ongoing story.

Episodic Stories

Big Bad Bureau campaigns lend themselves to episodic scenarios where each session is self-contained and focuses on a single Big Bad. The basic structure of a Big Bad Bureau 'episode' is as follows:

- **Mission Briefing.** Each episode starts with the Chief or Deputy Chief giving the party a rundown of the mission parameters, specifically which Big Bad is involved and what the mission objectives are. If special equipment is needed, the party will be told about that here.
- **Travel.** The party travels to the location of the mission, often near the Big Bad's lair. This part of the adventure is optional, and should only be included if the journey itself will be interesting, challenging, or interrupted in some way. Otherwise, the party can just start at the mission site.
- **Investigation.** The party investigates the current situation and determines the best course of action to complete their mission. This can include talking to locals, gathering evidence, and other investigative methods.
- **Action.** Once the party unravels the mystery, some kind of action will be required. This might be a social encounter, using diplomacy to convince a Big Bad, or a combat encounter. Typically in a Big Bad Bureau campaign, combat is rarely against the Big Bad themself, but it might be against another group interfering with them, or with their minions. Rarely, agents will have to fight a Big Bad head-on.
- **Resolution, Debrief, and Downtime.** Once the mission is complete, the party returns to HQ and reports to the Chief or Deputy Chief with their findings. Between missions, the party can interact with other Bureau agents, explore Bureau HQ, or have an opportunity to roleplay with their fellow teammates.

This episodic structure assumes that missions will be self-contained. Extended missions could take two or more sessions to complete, and ending a session on a cliffhanger is recommended for these longer adventures.

Alyse Stewart

Example Episodic Bureau Missions

The following are some example scenarios to use as jumping-off points for an episodic Big Bad Bureau campaign.

Blrrk's a Jrrk. The entire panel of judges for a Regional Wine Tasting competition has gone missing under suspicious circumstances in the town that King Blrrk uses as a base of operations. As it turns out, Blrrk's entry into the wine competition, "Eau d'Ooze," was rejected by the wine competition, and Blrrk wants to force the judges to change their tune. Can the agents rescue the wine judges without upsetting the big blob boss, or will all parties involved be tasting bitter defeat?

Egg-scapade. Two Big Bads have come into conflict and their battle is causing chaos. Thulyrix has stolen one of Gyx's eggs, and the bird is furiously hunting them down. In truth, Thulyrix's own precious egg has been stolen by a third party. Thulyrix only took Gyx's egg to comfort themself. Can the hard-boiled agents crack the case and put all the poached eggs back in their proper places, or will they get scrambled?

Hell's Bell. The bell attuned to the demon Wranrebur has vanished from The Wall of Bells in a puff of red smoke. A team of agents is dispatched to hunt down the wayward fiend and retrieve something sufficiently connected with him to forge a new bell. Wranrebur has no interest in being found. Will the agents be able to track him down, or will Wranrebur evade them long enough to cause some serious devastation?

Off the Hydrails. The carefully monitored path of the Hydrail has been disrupted by a cult that has cropped up around the gigantic mollusk. The cult has created a focused, magical ritual that has drawn the Hydrail towards a major city, in hopes of offering the city (and themselves) to the Hydrail as a sacrifice. Will the agents get the Hydrail back on track, or will all shell break loose?

Marija Tiurina

Overarching Villains

Though each session of a Big Bad Bureau campaign is a self-contained mission, it can be fun to have an overarching villain pulling the strings behind the scenes. Some of the Big Bads presented in this book are either too powerful or too isolated to make the focus of a single episode, but their scale and motivations make them ideal as opponents lurking in the background of a campaign.

An overarching villain's influence on missions should be gradual, with their true machinations being revealed only when it's almost too late to stop them. By the time their plans become clear, the Big Bad Bureau will be forced to step in and shut them down.

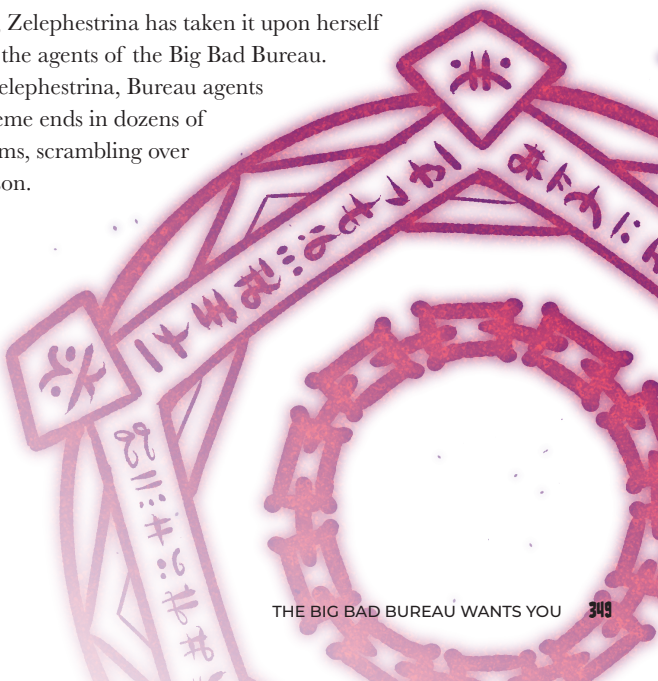
d6	Overarching Villain Motivations
1	I will use the Big Bad Bureau to manipulate lesser creatures to stage my own escape from my physical or metaphorical prison.
2	I require an object that I can only acquire by using the Bureau's resources.
3	I am tired of the Bureau interfering with my plans and I want to bring them down from within.
4	I understand the multiversal power of the Bureau and I want to wield it for myself.
5	I hold a grudge against a senior agent of the Bureau. I want to see them suffer.
6	I believe the Bureau is actually a sinister force, toying with us Big Bads for its own nefarious ends.

Example Big Bad Overarching Villain Plots

Imryss. The rogue psychopomp Imryss has turned her attention to the Bureau. She admires the agents' understated heroism and believes they belong in her collection. Imryss has determined that the best way to gather agents' souls is to ensure they don't survive their missions. That way, she can simply scoop them up and carry them off. Therefore, she has been riling up the other Big Bads, encouraging them to be extra deadly. Not content with a few agents' souls, eventually Imryss strikes at the Bureau HQ, aiming to capture the Chief's soul as a prize for her hoard

Vellai-Axal. Consumed with the need to drown as many worlds as possible, Vellai-Axal begins to find ways to seep into Bureau HQ, in hopes of using its network of teleportation circles and connections to other planes to spread its influence far and wide. Themes of water and drowning start to crop up in missions culminating in a different aquatic Big Bad like Shen or Captain Fulmini falling under Vellai-Axal's control.

Zelephestrina. Trapped in her tower, Zelephestrina has taken it upon herself to find a way to infiltrate the minds of all the agents of the Big Bad Bureau. After a standard mission to check in on Zelephestrina, Bureau agents all over HQ start acting strange. The scheme ends in dozens of agents, all seduced by Zele's devious charms, scrambling over themselves to free her from her tower prison.

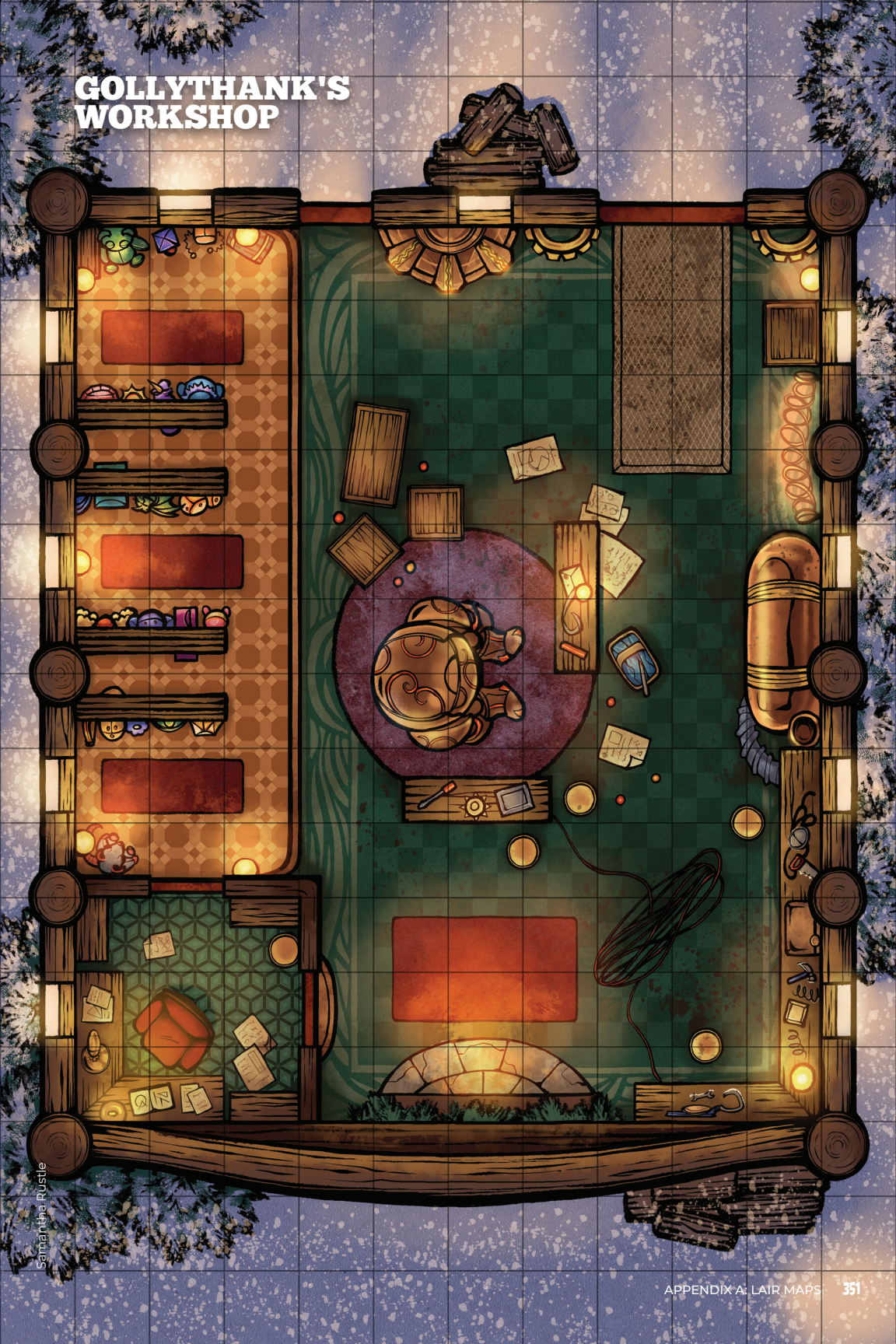


Russell Werges

APPENDIX A

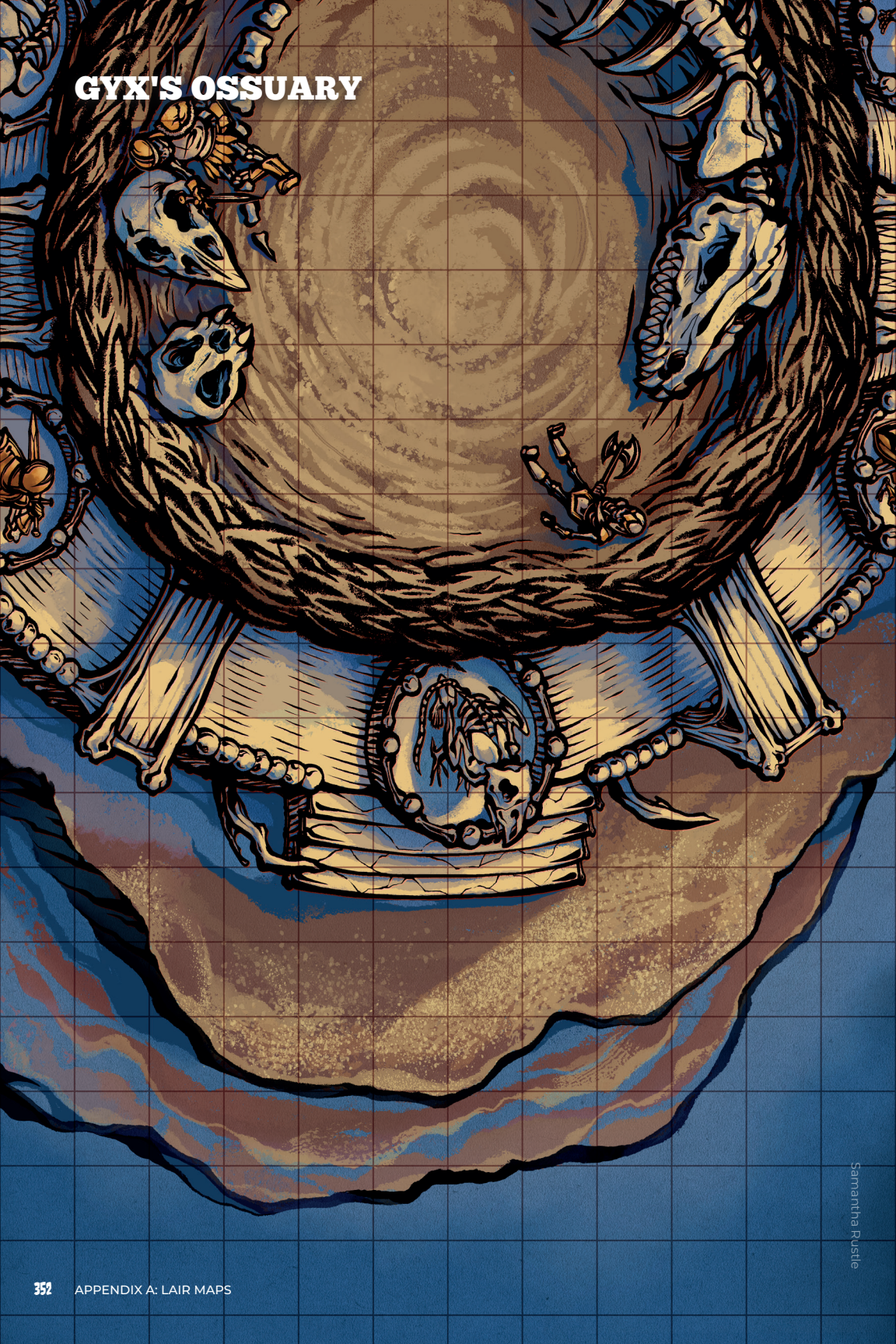
LAIR MAPS

GOLLYTHANK'S WORKSHOP



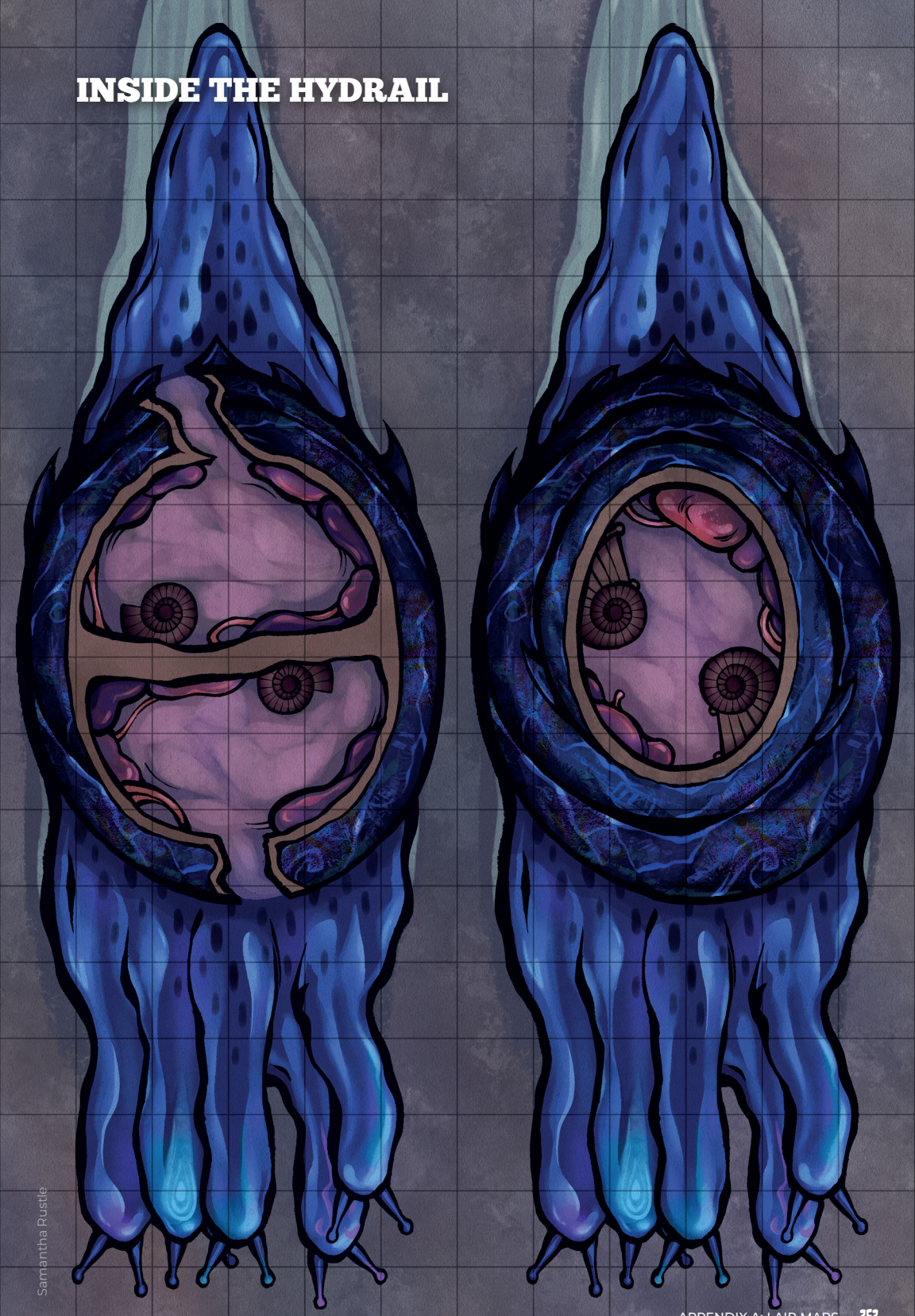
Samantha Rustle

GYX'S OSSUARY



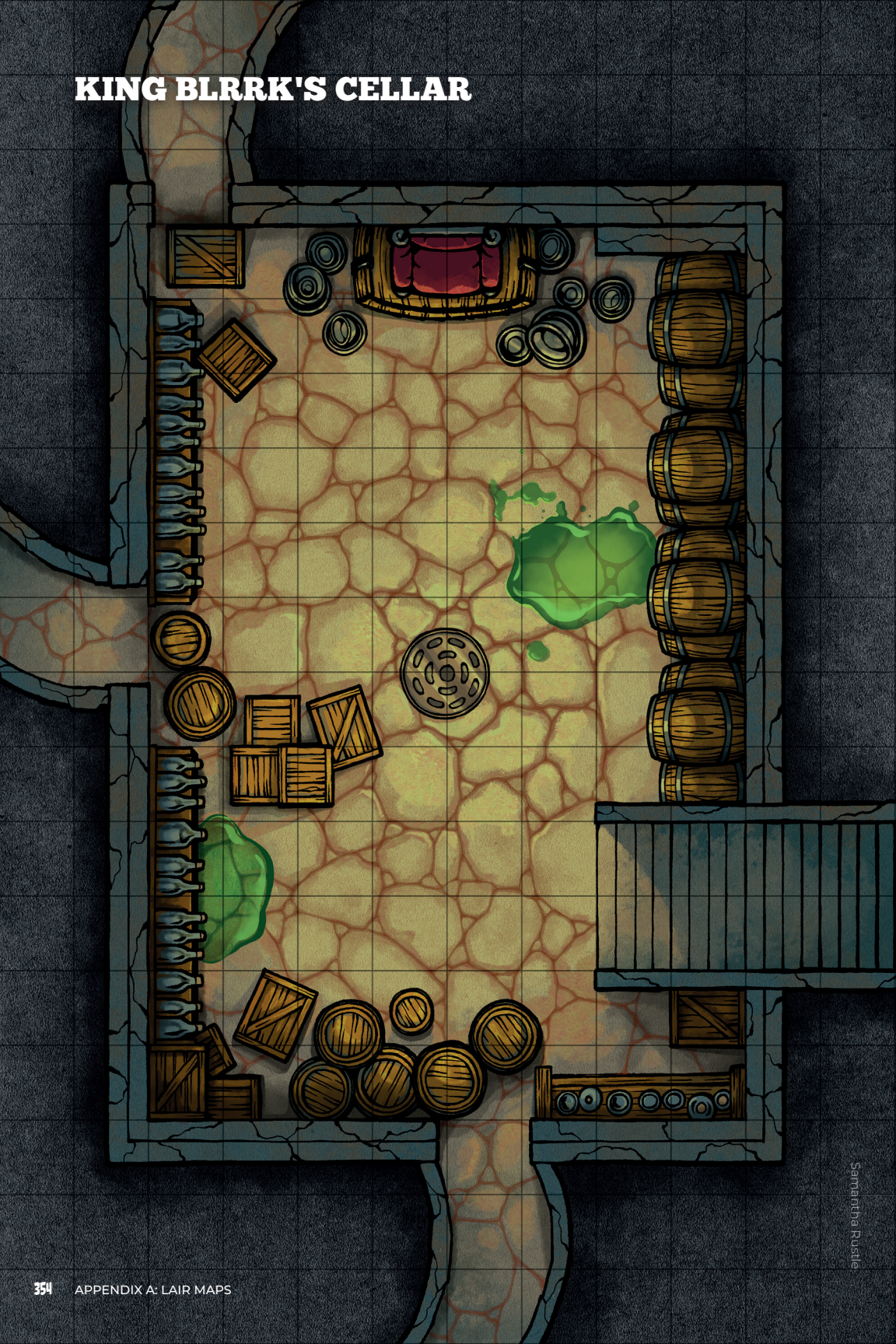
Samantha Rustle

INSIDE THE HYDRAIL



Samantha Rustle

KING BLRRK'S CELLAR



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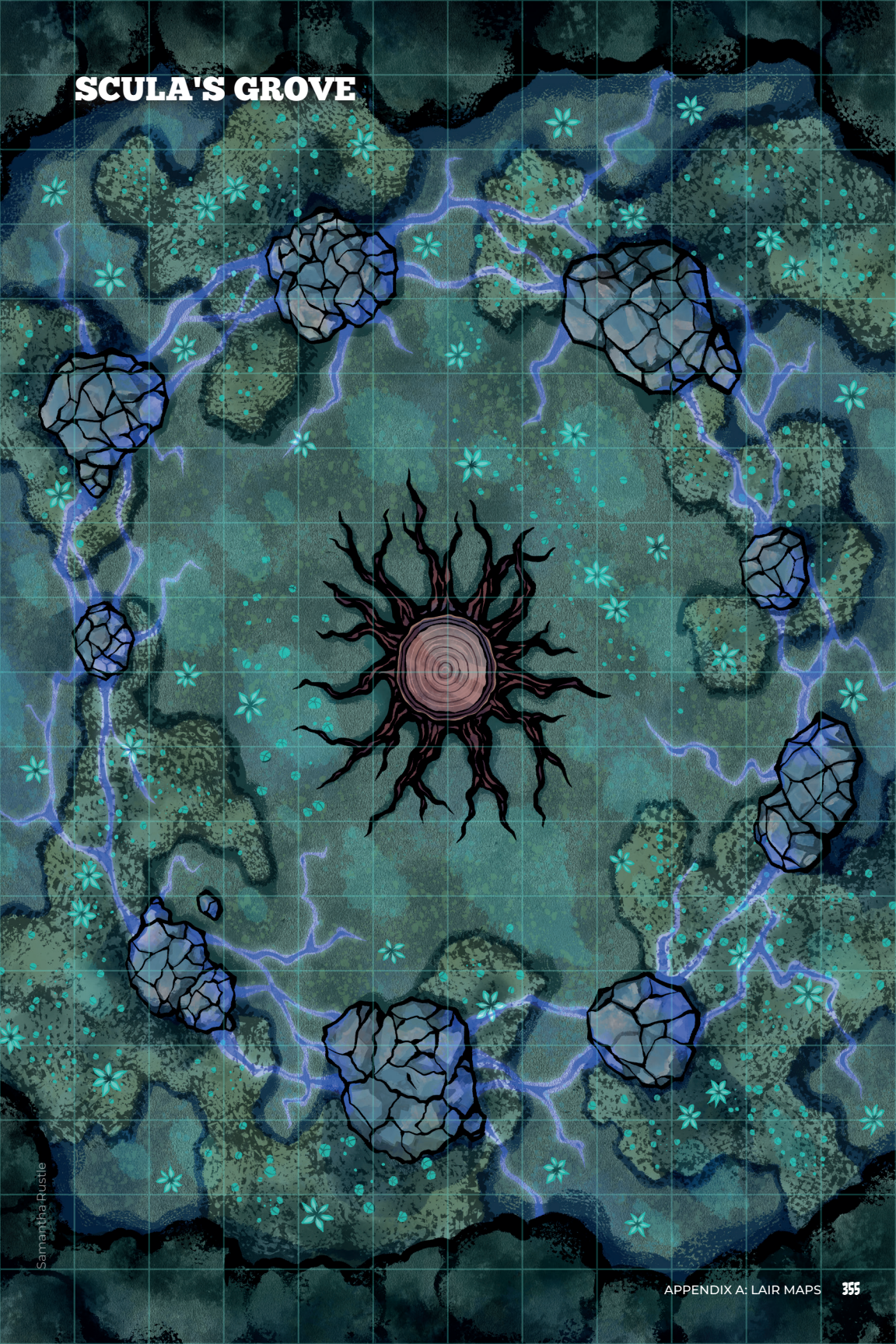
SCULA'S GROVE



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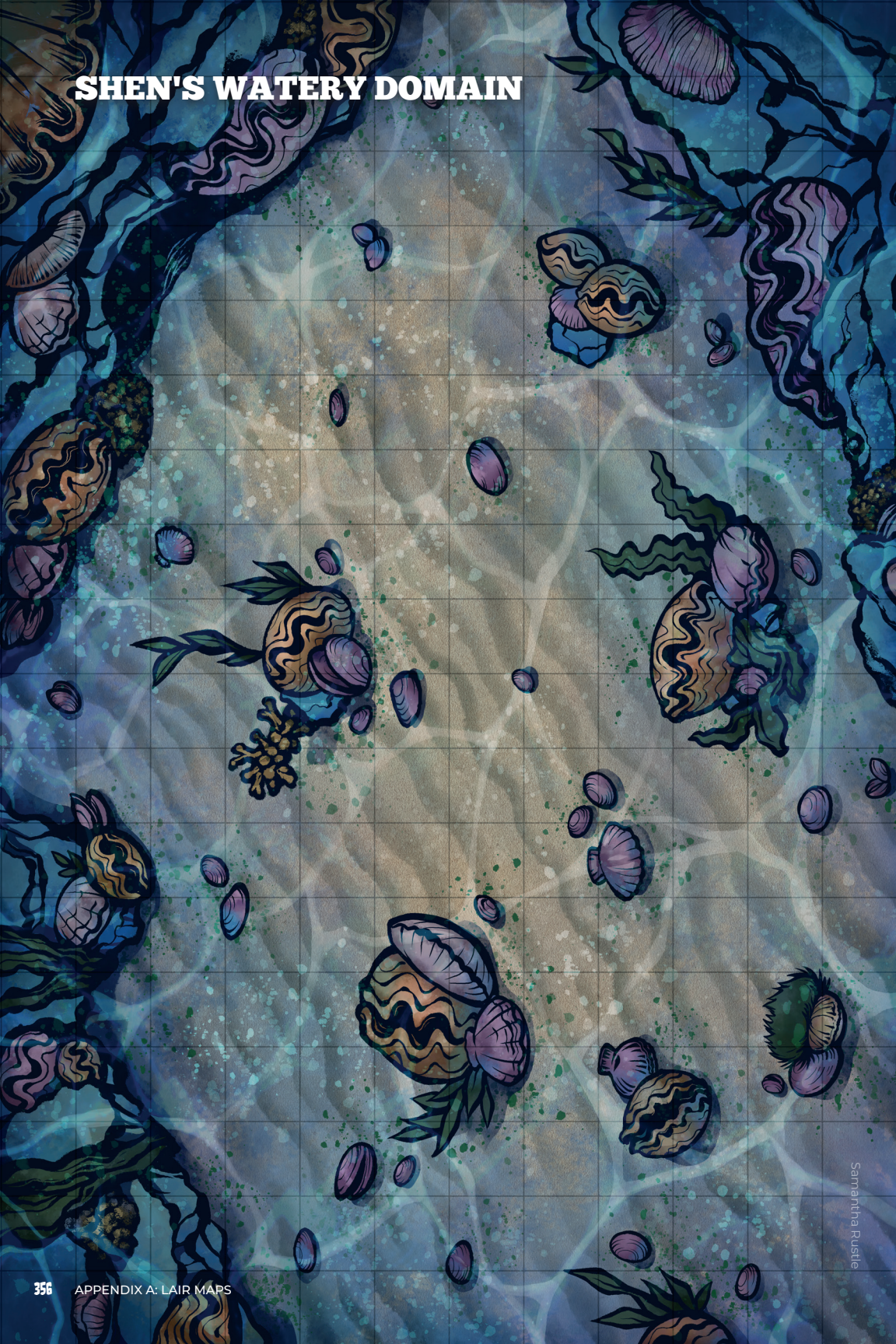
SHEN'S WATERY DOMAIN



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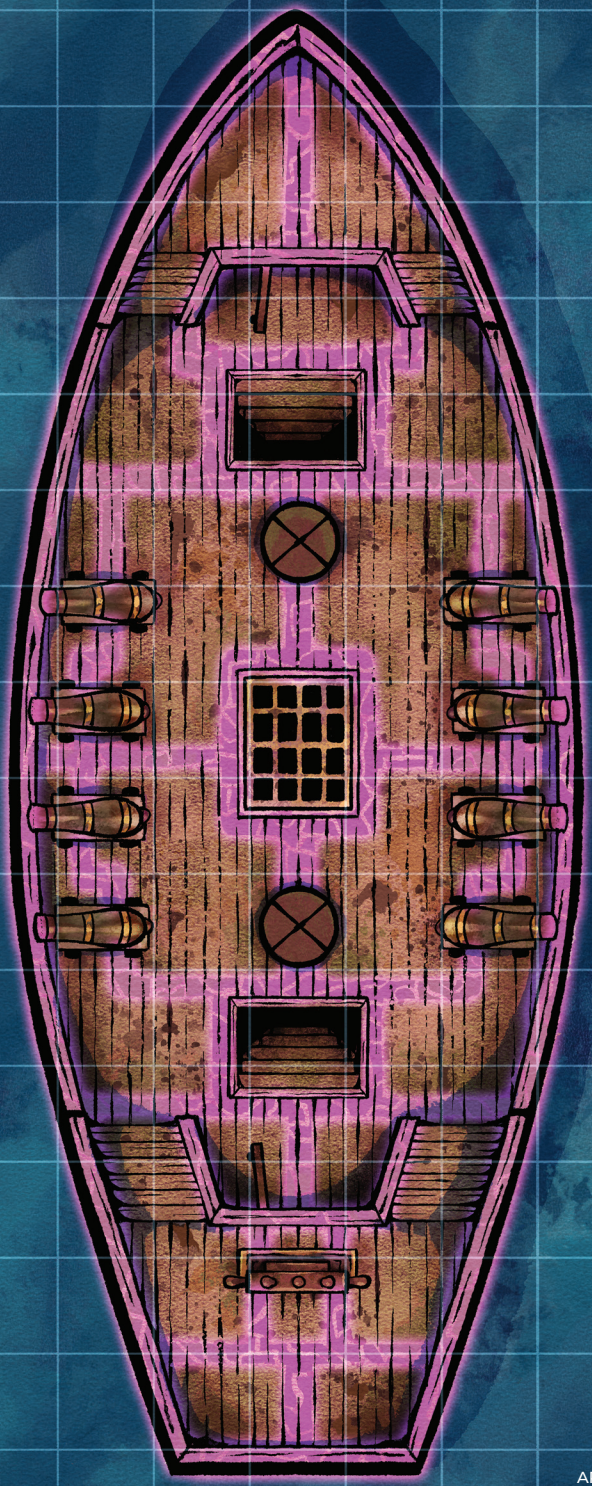
ABOARD THE MELCOMBE

UPPER DECK



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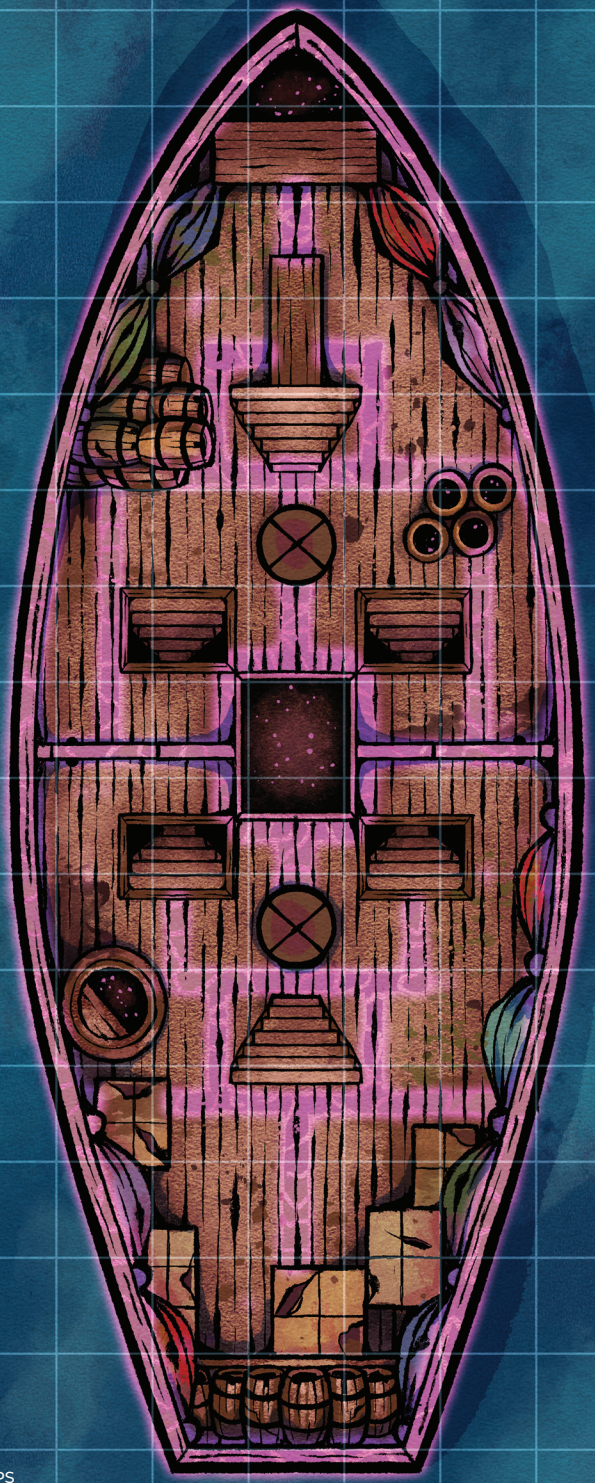
ABOARD THE MELCOMBE

MIDDLE DECK



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ABOARD THE MELCOMBE

HOLD

Samantha Rustle

APPENDIX B

BIG BADS BY CR AND TYPE

Frederico Piatti

Big Bads by CR

CR 1
Gollythank Gemmerous

CR 3
Shen The Clam-Monster
Tendon

CR 4
Bone

CR 5
Scula
Shen The Monstrous Carp
Zara

CR 6
Bean
Gollythank Gemmerous and His Holly Jolly Apparatus

CR 8
Exaxia
Magda
Pork
Shen The Young Aquatic Dragon
Tussentenner
Verreaux

CR 9
Akkadia
Gyx
Speckleback

CR 10
Imryss
Prince-in-Ivory
Zelephestrina

CR 11
Carsus
The Hydrail

CR 12
King Blrrk
Wranrebur

CR 13
Thulyrix The Liminal

CR 14
Captain Fulmini

CR 15
Daniel

CR 16
The Rat-infested Melcombe
The Maker

CR 18
The Rectification Engine

CR 19
Saewyn

CR 21
Vellai-Axal

CR 22
Rel'Um

CR 28
The Horned Giant

CR 30
Harathos

Big Bads by Type

Aberration
Thulyrix
Vellai-Axal

Beast
Gyx
The Melcombe

Celestial
Imryss
Harathos

Construct
Daniel
The Horned Giant
The Maker
The Rectification Engine

Dragon
Shen The Young Aquatic Dragon

Elemental
Saewyn

Fey
Prince-in-Ivory
Scula

Fiend
Wranrebur
Zelephestrina

Giant
Tussentenner

Humanoid
Akkadia
Gollythank
Magda
Pork and Bean
Tendon
Zara

Monstrosity
Bone
The Hydrail
Shen The Clam-Monster
Shen The Monstrous Carp
Speckleback
Verreaux

Ooze
King Blrrk

Plant
Carsus
Exaxia

Undead
Fulmini
Rel'Um

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